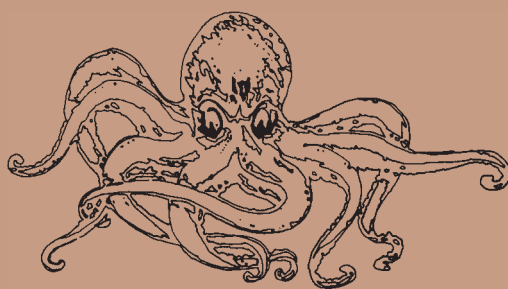


SOME
ARE
SMARTER
THAN
OTHERS



Pio Abad

Some are smarter than others

On the tenth of January 1991, a hoard of Regency-era silverware broke the record for the sale of silver at a Christie's auction in New York. Seventy-eight lots – an assortment of wine coolers, platters, tureens, candlesticks and dinner plates – sold for \$4,451,350. The prize lot was the *Egremont Service*, a one hundred and four piece dining set made in 1807 by the silversmith Paul Storr for Sir George O' Brien, the third Earl of Egremont. It was sold to an unidentified European collector for \$1.76 million.

The auction was the first part of a two-day sale held by Christie's on behalf of the Philippine revolutionary government. The sequestered silverware were among the items abandoned by Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos soon after they fled the presidential palace aboard one of Ronald Reagan's helicopters in February 1986. The impressive collection was one of the many elaborate indications of the couple's royal aspirations. It was also rumoured among social circles that Imelda had moved the Philippine Embassy in London next to Kensington Palace in the hope that a romance might blossom between her eldest daughter Imee and Prince Charles.



The following day, seventy-eight Renaissance paintings from the Marcos Collection sold for a total of \$15.4 million, well above the presale estimate of \$10 million. An early painting by the Italian master Raphael, *Saint Catherine of Alexandria*,

which dates from 1503, sold for \$1.65 million. El Greco's *Coronation of the Virgin*, painted in 1603, with an estimate of \$400,000, sold for \$2.1 million. Titian's *Portrait of Giulio Romano*, from about 1536, was expected to sell at \$300,000 but was bought for \$1.1 million. Surprisingly, the bidders were undeterred by the disclaimer printed on every page of the accompanying catalogue stating that Christie's warranty of authenticity did not apply to works executed before 1870.

Imelda's expansionist approach to collecting meant that the galleries who swarmed around her were able to do away with issues of provenance and authenticity as she often bought in bulk. An art dealer familiar with Imelda's purchases describes one particular transaction in May 1983. When told that she wanted a 'big collection of paintings by one artist,' the gallery proceeded to sell Imelda 52 paintings by Paule Gobillard, a little known Impressionist, for \$273,500. 'It was a nice way to get rid of paintings you didn't want', the dealer said.

Included in the auction were 25 paintings that had been confiscated by the US Federal Government from a wealthy Saudi businessman named Adnan Kashoggi. It was the discovery of this hoard, allegedly sold to Kashoggi by Mrs Marcos, that led to the indictment of both parties for fraud and racketeering. Imelda's tearful performance during the ensuing trial was sensational. At one point, she was strapped to a portable blood pressure monitor, which would gurgle loudly every time her blood pressure rose. Unfortunately, it also proved convincing. After a four-month trial in New York City, the jury decided that Ferdinand Marcos looted the Philippine treasury without the explicit knowledge of his wife. Imelda and Kashoggi were acquitted of all charges. Immediately after the verdict, Imelda headed to St. Patrick's Cathedral and proceeded to creep down the entire aisle to the altar on her knees.



The two-day sale earned the Philippine Government \$13,302,604. The proceeds of the sale were intended to fund the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme. A centrepiece of Corazon Aquino's newly democratic government, it was aimed at redistributing all public and private agricultural lands to benefit long disenfranchised

farmers. It was hoped that the programme would finally address the centuries-old problem of land inequality that has been a seedbed of Communist insurgency and social unrest.

In January 1987, less than a year after the revolutionary government took office, a farmer's march demanding the fulfilment of the promise of agrarian reform was violently dispersed. Thirteen farmers were killed and many wounded when government forces opened fire on the protesters. The incident set the stage for the further difficulties of implementing agrarian reform during the Aquino government.

In February 1990, my father was appointed Secretary of Agrarian Reform and tasked with the implementation of the programme. It was hoped that his activist background and experience working with farming communities would assert the perceived reformist agenda. However, it was this closeness that made members of the powerful Commission on Appointments uncomfortable, many of them wealthy landowners elected back into office after the twenty-year dictatorship. A series of farcical confirmation hearings ensued. They consisted of the Commission members convening only to announce that they have yet to reach a decision. My father ended up resigning three months into his fraught tenure amidst accusations of Communist affiliation, which he denied.



On the seventh of January 1991, a group of 35 artists, writers and filmmakers filed a legal action to block the Christie's auction. They argued that since the artefacts in question were purchased from misappropriated public funds, they are collectively owned by the public. In addition, as great works of art, they should be considered national cultural treasures and placed under the protection of the State.

While it initially appeared to endanger the sale, the Philippine Supreme Court ruled that the petition was devoid of merit and had no legal basis. On the question of ownership, there was no way of proving that the items in question are in fact public property. Imelda Marcos had managed to set up various non-profit, non-stock corporations that purchased the paintings and donated them to another non-profit,



Prince Charles and Imelda Marcos at the coronation and wedding of King Birendra in Kathmandu, March 1975



A royal family portrait of the Marcoses

Imelda trial on plunder charges set

NEW YORK -- Mrs. Imelda Marcos, widow of ousted Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, goes on trial here next week on charges that she used her country's treasury as a personal treasure chest -- and she's counting on a man in a Stetson hat to keep her out of jail.

If convicted, the former beauty queen once called the "Iron Butterfly" by her nation, could face a maximum of 40 years in jail.

Mrs. Marcos is reported to have turned down a plea bargain that would have kept her jail time to a minimum but would have required pleading guilty to at least one of the charges against her.

Instead, she hired a new attorney, flamboy-

ant defense lawyer Gerry Spence from Wyoming, who wears a Stetson hat and is famed for winning some widely publicized cases.

The trial, which also involves Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi, promises to be an international event, drawing as much attention as the case of another high-rolling "queen" -- Leona Helmsley, the New York hotel empress who was convicted of income tax evasion last year.

Jury selection is scheduled to begin on Tuesday in Manhattan federal court and the government has estimated its part of the case will last two to three months.



MRS. MARCOS KHASHOGGI

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Orbos, Drilon get CA nod; Abad to quit?

By TONY S. BERGONIA

THE Commission on Appointments yesterday unanimously confirmed the appointments of Transportation Secretary Oscar Orbos, Justice Secretary Franklin Drilon and Philippine representative to the United Nations Sedfrey Ordoñez, while deferring once more the confirmation of Agrarian Reform Secretary Florencio Abad.

Abad's confirmation as agrarian reform secretary is being blocked by congressmen belonging to the pro-administration *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* party who question his agrarian reform policies.

Shortly after the CA session, Abad sought an unscheduled appointment with President Aquino in the Guest House, and unconfirmed reports had it that the former Batangas congressman was planning to tender his resignation.

When asked about these reports, Press Secretary Tomas Gomez III merely replied: "No comment." After talking with the President, Abad eluded the media by slipping out the backdoor.

Before Abad's visit, Presidential spokesman Adolfo Azcuna told reporters yesterday he was "personally confident" Abad may be confirmed in next Wednesday's confirmation hearing, saying Abad was qualified for the post.

When asked if the President would personally intervene to have Abad confirmed, Azcuna



ROGER CHABO

SEN. Ernesto Maceda (right) talks to the three newly confirmed Cabinet members (from left): Philippine Representative to the UN Sedfrey Ordoñez, Justice Secretary Franklin Drilon and Transport Secretary Oscar Orbos.

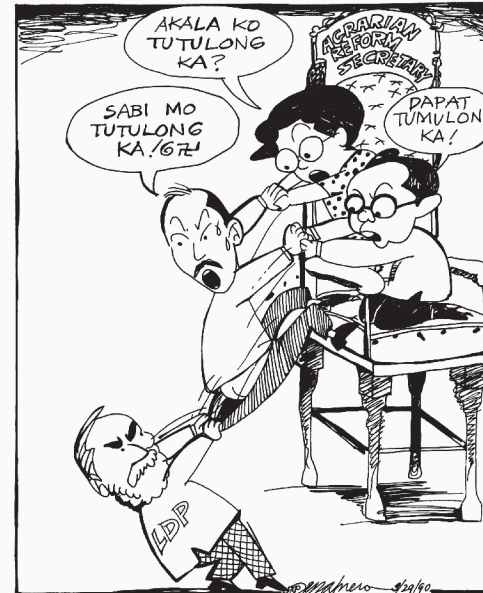
said there was no need for Ms. Aquino to get involved as "the fact that the President appointed Abad and submitted his appointment for confirmation is endorsement in itself."

Meanwhile, DAR sources said LDP leaders had convinced Abad to abide by Ms. Aquino's decision Monday to allow the government-owned National Development Corp. and its Japanese partners to transform part of the disputed 230-hectare agricultural estate in Dasmariñas, Cavite, into an industrial estate.

The party leaders in turn promised Abad that his confirmation would no longer be blocked, the sources said. But on Tuesday night, the LDP informed the appointments commission of the party's decision to ask for the postponement of Abad's confirmation pending review of his agrarian reform policies.

It was Rep. Miguel Ramero (LDP, Negros Oriental), CA vice chairman, who invoked Section 20 of the CA rules, which gives any CA member the right to ask

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The Tasadays in National Geographic Magazine, August 1972



A painting of Malakas at Maganda commissioned by Imelda Marcos
© Leonardo Cruz

non-stock corporation set up by the First Lady. The silverware, on the other hand, were discovered in various guesthouses near the presidential palace and subsequently confiscated by the government, an act that doesn't legally translate to acquisition. The lack of paperwork with regards to these items made it impossible to clarify how they were acquired. On the rejection of the second point, the Supreme Court argued that the Renaissance paintings and Georgian silverware could not be considered national cultural treasures as the Constitution limits the term to 'cultural relics' directly related to authentic Philippine heritage and tradition. The question of what qualifies as authentic cultural relics remains a complicated one as the Marcoses deployed the full powers of the state in constructing their own versions of authenticity.



The most incredible of these fabrications concerned a man named Manuel 'Manda' Elizalde. A scion of one of the few old elite families who supported the regime, he was appointed by Ferdinand Marcos as the head of PANAMIN (Presidential Assistance on National Minorities), an organisation charged with the protection of Philippine ethnic minorities. Elizalde's penchant for ethnic minorities went well beyond his official duties. Visitors to his Manila mansion were treated to the sight of tribes living in exact replicas of their village huts, wearing nothing but tribal costume. There was a preponderance of women, a good few of whom were little more than children, who would bow to him or kiss his feet when he paid a visit to the 'authentic' village in the middle of his garden.

In June 1971, Elizalde announced that an undiscovered Stone Age Tribe called the Tasadays had been found living undisturbed in the dense jungles of the Southern Philippines. The group, consisting of 27 members, lived in the mouth of a cave, spoke an unknown tongue and only wore palm leaves. In keeping with the Edenic simplicity of their long hair and near-nudity, they were credited with having no knowledge of war or aggression. After their discovery, the Tasadays became momentary celebrities, gracing the cover of the *National Geographic Magazine* and making an appearance on an NBC primetime television special. Imelda frequently choppered into the forest to visit them with Charles Lindbergh and the Italian starlet Gina Lollobrigida.

In 1976, the 45,000 acre reserve that was set aside for the Tasadays was closed and trespassing made punishable by imprisonment or deportation. So pure and untouched were the Tasadays that they had to be protected from the contaminating effects of civilisation. In 1986, after the fall of the Marcos regime, a Swiss reporter named Oswald Iten ventured into the Tasaday reserve accompanied by a local journalist. There they encountered several members of the tribe who confessed that they were, in fact, farmers from a nearby village who had been coerced into posing as cavemen.



It remains unclear whether Elizalde conjured up the Tasaday hoax on his own or in collusion with Ferdinand, but the regime certainly exploited this 'discovery' for political capital. By 1971, Marcos' second term was going from worse to worst: he had been suffering destabilising attacks from Maoist guerrillas and violent protests from leftist students, the Philippines' status as the democratic bulwark of Communism in Asia was on precarious ground and the polls leading up to the midterm elections were not looking favourable for his administration.

On the twenty-first of August 1971, a grenade attack during an election rally killed ten and wounded 66 opposition party candidates. Marcos blamed the attack on the Communists and suspended *habeas corpus*. The incident was followed by a staged assassination attempt on the defence minister, Juan Ponce Enrile. On the twenty-first of September 1972, Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law. The military arrested key opposition leaders, student and labour activists, journalists and common criminals. It was not lifted until 1981 and, even then, as nothing more than a nominal concession to the impending visit of Pope John Paul II.

The international attention that the Tasadays attracted served as the ideal smokescreen to the unfolding political situation. The idyllic images of leaf clad forest dwellers foraging for root crops and tadpoles were much more acceptable representations of life under the regime than the scenes of mass arrests and summary executions taking place all over the country.



The Edenic vision presented by the Tasadays fit perfectly with the nationalist narrative that Imelda and Ferdinand had constructed to justify their totalitarian rule. They presented themselves as reincarnations of a primeval couple from which the entire Filipino race is said to originate – a post-colonial Adam and Eve. According to local legend, *Malakas* (The Strong One) and *Maganda* (The Beautiful One) enter the world fully formed when a magical bird splits a single stalk of bamboo open, revealing them cradled inside.

The image of Ferdinand as *Malakas* and Imelda as *Maganda* was ruthlessly deployed as the iconographic representation of their conjugal rule. Pictorial re-interpretations of the myth, Imelda with long flowing hair preserving her dignity next to an equally nude and overly muscular Ferdinand lying inside a bamboo stem, were fed into the propaganda machine and proliferated as murals and sculptures throughout the city. Plans were drawn up to build a statue of the couple taller than the Empire State Building that would double as a gigantic lighthouse along Manila Bay. Fortunately, Ferdinand and Imelda were forced out of the country before this plan could be realised.



On the thirteenth of January 2014, the New York Supreme Court sentenced Vilma Bautista, a former personal aide to Imelda, to two to six years in prison for conspiracy and tax fraud in connection with the sale of *Le Bassin aux Nymphéas*. The 1899 masterpiece by Claude Monet was one of the reportedly one hundred and fifty works of art that went missing shortly after the Marcoses' ouster. Among those that remain unaccounted for are *Fruit Dish, Bottle and Guitar*; *Reclining Woman* and *Head of a Woman* by Pablo Picasso, *Fruits* by Paul Gauguin, *Trois Danseuses* by Edgar Degas and *La Marqueza de Sta. Cruz* by Francisco Goya.

