

Presented at the 10th DLSU Arts Congress

De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

February 16, 2017



## THE OTHERING OF THE OTHERS: The Indigenous in Contemporary Visual Art Practices in the Philippines

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**Abstract:** The Ifugaos; proud indigenous people of the northern mountains of Luzon in the Philippines and their cultural heritage are often used as a fine example of pre-Hispanic culture. They are defined as a lingering cultural structure whose historical narrative boasts of being mostly un-aculturated by dominant structures that pervaded their homeland.

However, the narratives of the structure of power relations between the dominant and lingering culture proposes a prejudicial image against the Indigenous people. The Ifugao people and their cultural heritage are frequently appropriated in both cultural and contemporary art practices by local and foreign tourists, artists, etc. Such appropriations of cultural artifacts led to commodification of the Ifugao people's cultural identity and heritage.

Historical accounts from the 1904 St. Louis World Fair to contemporary visual arts practices provides unsettling accounts of self-inflicted Orientalism in the Philippines. Defined as a pervading practice where the dominant culture is a willing participant in relegating the lingering culture in an unseemingly derogatory status in the narrative of history as power. This paper is critical of the effects of these prejudiced ideas and actions.

Furthermore, this paper argues that the use and commercialization of the bulul, an Ifugao ritual image/object by the Ifugaos themselves can also be perceived as self-inflicting Orientalism, the Ifugaos used these cultural artifacts, made copies of them (infuse with Western aesthetics) and sold them for income. The anthropomorphic carving of an Ifugao rice guardian, the Bulul is a familiar souvenir item along with other self-produced images of the said northern mountain tribe. Its physicality is more of a touristic aesthetic interpretation rather than its own indigenous attributes. This same ritual image/object is often mis-appropriated in the contemporary art scene without even a comprehensive perspective as to its purpose of being.