



**Pavilion of the Philippines
at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia**

Title: Sea of Love / Dagat ng Pag-ibig

Commissioner: National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Office of Senator Loren Legarda;

Curator: Mara Gladstone; *Exhibitor:* Jon Cuyson

Venue: Arsenale

Sea of Love / Dagat ng Pag-ibig will represent the Philippines at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, open to the public from May 9 to November 22, 2026. The Philippine Pavilion is commissioned by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Office of Senator Loren Legarda.

Sea of Love / Dagat ng Pag-ibig features work by the Manila-based visual artist and filmmaker Jon Cuyson. Essential forms from the artist's 30-year practice, including paintings, videos and sculptures, pay homage to the Filipino seafarers who populate our global waterways. The exhibition is curated by Mara Gladstone, a California-based curator and educator.

"I am honored to represent the Philippines on the world's most prestigious stage for contemporary art," says Jon Cuyson. "My projects have been shaped through modules of memory – a practice of interconnected works that act as partial archives for submerged histories, maritime labor and fragments of belonging. Our exhibition for the Venice Biennale continues this inquiry by exploring mussels as a motif and metaphor for understanding kinship across land and sea."

"We are grateful for the opportunity to share Jon's beautifully immersive work with international audiences," says Mara Gladstone. "Developing this project with our Filipino collaborators, from mussel farmers to aquaculture experts, affirms our understanding of waterways as more than pathways to other lands. Water is also a place to find a sense of home. I am a child of diaspora, and the Filipino story has always been based within the context of travel. Our project illuminates the humanizing forces of love within the ebb and flow of globalization in sync with our undulating oceans."

Sea of Love / Dagat ng Pag-ibig situates a spatial system of paintings, videos and sculptures to form an abstracted horizon embedded with an oceanic love story told from four perspectives: the sailor, his mother, his lover, and the sea of echoes. Immersive and buoyed by light, sound and reflection, Cuyson's installation channels the lives and longings of the seafarer, his family, ships and mollusks to center and humanize Filipino labor across oceans. Under-recognized yet always present, the Filipino seafarer is not unlike the humble mussel: resilient, enduring endless flows of water. Mussels also hold the memory of the oceans within their very forms, filtering, clustering and creating new life in the process. Cuyson's project explores mussels as a motif, method and metaphor for understanding kinship across land and sea through his creative practice that circulates, clings and gathers. Rooted in queer and postcolonial ecologies, the artist's "memory modules" are envisioned as a body at sea, a vessel with portals and skin-surfaces connecting submerged histories, maritime labor and fragments of belonging.

The exhibition is accompanied by public programs as well as a catalogue with contributions from Filipino and international scholars exploring maritime history, Southeast Asian contemporary art, seafaring cultures and marine science. Contributors and advisors include: Roderick Galam, Kris Alexanderson, Lilibeth Salvador Reyes, Machel Malay, Khale Bantigue Fajardo, Eli Guieb, Alphonse Chiu and Jose Mari Cuartero. The publication is designed by Jessica Fleischmann and Lauren Leung-Cramer of Still Room.

Sea of Love / Dagat ng Pag-ibig is the sixth participation of the Philippines at the Biennale Arte since it returned in 2015 with Senator Loren Legarda's advocacy to re-establish and affirm the presence of Filipino art and culture internationally.

About Jon Cuyson

Jon Cuyson (b. Manila, Philippines, 1969) is a Filipino interdisciplinary artist whose practice exists across installation, painting, sculpture, books and moving images. Rooted in queer and postcolonial ecologies, his work explores the sea as a living archive, an unstable site where memory, labor, migration, and desire continually shift and recombine. In 2010, he founded Everyday Productions, a platform for experimentation across art, cinema and scenography. His experimental films have screened in festivals abroad, while his paintings and sculptures have been exhibited in Asia, Europe, and the United States, including at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS (London); Times Museum (China); and the Bronx Museum (New York). Cuyson studied at the University of the Philippines, Baguio City and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. He earned his MFA in Painting from Columbia University and has held academic positions at institutions in Manila. Cuyson is based in the Philippines, where he continues to live and work.

About Mara Gladstone

Mara Gladstone (b. New York, USA, 1977) is a curator and educator who is committed to creating transdisciplinary, welcoming spaces for art that nurture connections between people and the environment. She has organized exhibitions, public art, programs and publications at Desert X, the Palm Springs Art Museum, and the J. Paul Getty Museum in partnership with community leaders and civic agencies. Prior projects include those with Kelly Akashi, Serge Attukwei Clottey, Gerald Clarke, Gisela Colon, Paul Davies, Jessie Homer French, Victoria Fu, Nicholas Galanin, Todd Gray, Rania Ho, Pat Lasch, Hung Liu, Karen Lofgren, Wang Qingsong, Adee Roberson, Jono Rotman, Jonathan van Dyke and Wang Wei. Gladstone holds degrees from the University of Rochester (MA, PhD) and Brown (BA) and is a dual citizen of the United States and the Philippines.

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