

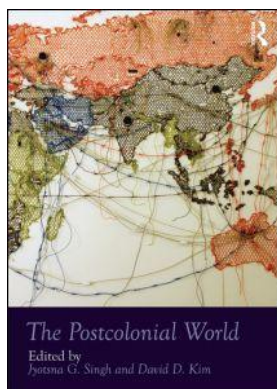
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## **The Postcolonial World**

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### **Queer Camouflage as Survival, Presence, and Expressive Capital in the Postcolonial Artwork of Kiam Marcelo Junio**

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

# QUEER CAMOUFLAGE AS SURVIVAL, PRESENCE, AND EXPRESSIVE CAPITAL IN THE POSTCOLONIAL ARTWORK OF KIAM MARCELO JUNIO



*Jan Christian Bernabe*

In this chapter I present a critical analysis of a body of multidisciplinary artwork: a single-channel video piece *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)*, and *Mimesis I & Mimesis II* from the *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing*, a series all created by the Philippine-born and Chicago-based Kiam Marcelo Junio, a Filipino postcolonial multidisciplinary artist.<sup>1</sup> A former U.S. Navy corpsman for seven years before the abolishment of the U.S. anti-gay policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” Junio appropriates the term and act of *camouflage* from “their” military experience as a tactical aesthetic strategy of subversion that manifests both corporeally and materially through Junio’s artistic practice. After his service in the Navy, they would attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). I use the plural term “their” throughout this chapter since Junio identifies both as a postcolonial genderqueer or gender-nonconforming individual and artist as well as through a performance of Junio’s drag “alter-ego” Jerry Blossom.<sup>2</sup> Junio describes Jerry Blossom as “a genderqueer Filipino femme-presenting persona who hails from an alternate post-queer, post-colonialist utopia/universe in which the Philippines is a world power.”<sup>3</sup>

The appropriation of camouflage in their body of work from military vernacular and praxis, I argue, is an ironic postcolonial queer survival *tactical act* that emerges out of the legacies of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines – beginning in the late nineteenth century after the defeat of Spain during the Spanish American War and continuing on with the American colonial rule in the Philippines (1898–1946) – and the multiple valences with which the U.S. empire has burdened postcolonial subjects within the United States and throughout the Filipino diaspora. U.S. imperialism in the Philippines has left its mark on Filipino postcolonial subjects, whether through American cultural imperialism that the author Jessica Hagedorn has masterfully woven into her novel *Dogeaters*; or through transnational flows of labor, an example being that of Filipino nurses in the United States; and through the continued presence of American military in the islands despite the “official” closures of American military bases in 1992.<sup>4</sup> In other words, while the United States officially recognized Philippine independence in 1946, the U.S. empire’s presence continues to impact the Philippines and Filipinos to this day. Following this premise of American dominance,

this chapter heeds Sarita See's intervention of claiming Filipino postcolonial subjects as "foreign in a domestic sense" – postcolonial subjects that are always already queer in relation to the U.S. empire.<sup>5</sup>

My use of the term *tactical act* also signifies a self-conscious, deliberate aesthetic strategy that cannot be separated from the politics of race, sexuality, gender, and representation, especially given the fraught history of U.S.–Philippine postcolonial and ongoing neocolonial relations. Indeed, as Lisa Lowe argues, "the question of aesthetic representation is always also a debate about political representation."<sup>6</sup> As recent scholarship has argued, Filipino American, and more broadly, Asian American racialization, is woven intricately to gender and sexuality.<sup>7</sup> Historical representations of the exotic Asian female and the emasculated Asian male continue to resonate in American popular culture to this day. The Asian American actress Lucy Liu, for instance, embodies the exotic Asian female character in her role as Alex Munday in the *Charlie's Angels* movie franchise. And on the other hand, Asian American actor Matthew Moy plays the desexualized Han Lee in the hit television show *Two Broke Girls*.

The U.S. empire's historical and material entanglements in the Philippines and throughout the diaspora continue its ongoing attempts, whether through American military interventions or through the ubiquity of American popular culture throughout the islands, I argue, to create what Michel Foucault has labeled *docile bodies*.<sup>8</sup> "A body is docile that," as Foucault writes, "may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the biopolitics of the U.S. empire, the project of governance to discipline and manage the lives of colonized Filipinos, act as generative constraints for postcolonial artists. In their colonial governance of Filipino natives, visual technologies such as photography and political cartoons at the turn of the twentieth century worked to advance reductive and binary modes of representing the colonizer and the colonized (i.e., civilized versus primitive) – images of Filipinos as children guided into civilization by the United States were all too common.<sup>10</sup> These reductive constraints have ironically also produced Filipino postcolonial bodies as agents of representations themselves, producing representations of Filipinos that interrogate the visual and discursive grammar of "us" versus "them." For example, in his seminal film *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995), Filipino American artist Marlon Fuentes questions the very nature of the U.S. empire's knowledge production by visually appropriating ethnographic strategies used by American colonial officials on Filipinos at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> Fuentes's appropriative ethnographic strategy in his film reveals the challenges that the Philippines and the ethnically diverse people presented to the U.S. empire's project of knowledge production about Filipinos as well as to empire building in general. Fuentes's film exposes the material and epistemic limits of the U.S. empire precisely due to the Philippine's geography and diverse population. Thus, it is important to recognize how, through their artwork, Filipino postcolonial artists like Marlon Fuentes and Kiam Marcelo Junio reveal the disorderly nature of the projects of the U.S. empire, especially its attempts to produce and ossify representations of Filipinos.

In this chapter, I am interested in the messiness and limitations of the U.S. empire, refracted through the appropriative tactics found in the artwork of Kiam Marcelo Junio. That is, in the U.S. empire's attempts to structure and order lives in the metropole and colony through visual and cultural productions, artists like Junio

show through their artwork how the U.S. empire has strayed from its original intent – its desire for material and epistemic order. The U.S. empire could not have expected the pointed historical and cultural critiques by postcolonial artists. Junio’s artwork captures U.S. imperialism’s limits, if not its failures.

## ROUTES: THE MESSINESS OF THE U.S. EMPIRE

The artwork of Filipino queer postcolonial artists like Junio captures the representational slippages and the epistemic limits of projects of the U.S. empire. It is within these cracks and fissures that the artwork of Junio takes root and thrives. Junio’s art works illuminate U.S. imperial dominance and its failures to create docile bodies insofar as these failures produce and reproduce binary and reductive modes of thinking about race and representation of Filipino post/colonized bodies. While on the surface the U.S. empire may seem to succeed in creating docile bodies without the power to self-represent, so dominant within colonial and postcolonial geographies and knowledge production; the empire, however, fails to fully contain the very bodies that it was meant to manage and control – or queer bodies that challenge its ethos. That is to say, Junio’s art produces an anti-imperial and anti-colonial presence that stands counter to the U.S. empire’s representational practices. In her assessment of Asian American art, Margo Machida notes: “The symbolic assertion of presence through strategic acts of visual representations . . . can provide a previously neglected people with a powerful claim to place in a society where their images are not the norm.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the proliferation of perverse or deviant modernities as evidenced by bodies and bodies of work that refuse to be assimilated into gendered and sexualized systems of colonial knowledge and governance are inspired by the very slippages within the U.S. empire.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, these slippages in the discursive and visual regimes of the of U.S. empire enable and inspire the creation of oppositional archives that hold therein queer postcolonial affects, desires, fantasies, and knowledge production.

Conveyed by the subheadings in this chapter, I use the terms that frame the linear telos of colonization as ironic signposts: from discovery, contact, and the aftermath. I do this not to reinforce colonial scripts about the Other, but rather to give readers pause so to think critically about the symbolic and epistemic power that these labels continue to hold within postcolonial studies. Visual and epistemic projects of the U.S. empire in the Philippines act as the scaffolding for this chapter and, more specifically, in my critique and analysis of Junio’s artwork. Yet the content within these subheadings make it clear that the project of colonialism and neocolonialism was and continues to be messy, beholden to contradictions, and conducive to creative cultural production.

By way of describing my own path to discovery of Junio’s work online, my discussion reflects an examination and interrogation of gender normativity that Junio’s artwork inspires. Their work stands as a point-of-entry for critiques of U.S. imperial fantasies about Filipino bodies and bodies of knowledge. The spectral presence of U.S. imperialism looms behind Junio’s work and, as I argue elsewhere, inspires an *archive imperative* for Filipino postcolonial artists like Junio. The archive imperative “is a critical, creative, and fundamentally political artistic praxis that, at its core, troubles the stability and certainties of knowledge production of the American empire.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Junio’s work is in no way exceptional, but rather stands among

other Filipino postcolonial artists like Marlon Fuentes, Stephanie Syjuco, Michael Arcega, Gina Osterloh, among others within what Sarita See describes as this “Filipino American cultural moment.”<sup>15</sup> This moment highlights the critical mass of contemporary artists of Filipino descent working in the United States from the 1980s to the present, whose artwork captures the ongoing concerns of race and representation, as imaged figuratively and abstractly. According to Sarita See, “That the Filipino American cultural moment constitutes simultaneously new and unfinished business indicates the need for alternative analytical frameworks for Filipino American art and expressive culture.”<sup>16</sup> The production of art and performances by Junio and other Filipino postcolonial artists proliferates and advances decolonizing work within this current milieu.

“Filipino America,” as Sarita See writes, “owes its existence to the monumentally violent and monumentally forgotten inclusion of the Philippines in the United States more than a century ago.”<sup>17</sup> I argue that this “violent and often forgotten inclusion” creates the spaces for Filipino postcolonial artists like Junio to recuperate collective and personal historical narratives of military experiences, for example, interwoven as critiques of the present in order to transform future trajectories of art historical criticism and canon formation. A Filipino queer futurity takes hold within Junio’s art practice. Their works, at once visually and viscerally alluring, also project a disruptive aura through Junio’s formal and conceptual performances. José Muñoz writes, “Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.”<sup>18</sup> Junio’s work speaks to an epistemic void of understanding the historical entanglements of the United States and the Philippines, and in particular between the U.S. empire and its Filipino postcolonial subjects. Something in the present moment is not enough. Something in Junio’s *oeuvre* causes viewers to pause, to think, to disrupt, to scratch their heads as they walk away.

Thus, Junio’s appropriation of signs and signifiers of the U.S. empire must be taken as their tactical act of survival that continues into the present day. Moreover, beyond appropriating the vernacular language and the signifiers of U.S. imperialism in their work, Junio challenges its hetero-patriarchal normativity through their drag persona “Jerry Blossom.”<sup>19</sup> Jerry Blossom becomes an embodied performance of camouflaging, though with a conceptual twist. In their performances, Jerry Blossom refuses to submit completely to gendered binaries, hierarchies, and norms. Their performance of femininity is questionable. During live performances, Jerry Blossom’s audience either stands in awe at the sight of Jerry Blossom or is “mostly baffled.”<sup>20</sup> Jerry Blossom becomes the embodiment of the ultimate fear experienced by any imperial entity – in this case the U.S. empire – the fear of the disorder created by performative play, evoking potential havoc that their postcolonial queer body engenders. Like the artist Junio, Jerry Blossom is not a docile body, but rather a disruptive force with which U.S. imperial interests must reckon.

Junio’s video performance *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* and the two art installations *Mimesis I* and *Mimesis II* from the ongoing *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing* series produce profound expressive capital through Junio’s use of the Internet (*YouTube*) as well as their appropriation of vernacular military aesthetics.

In broad terms, Margo Machida defines expressive capital as “a form of capital that adds greatly to a society’s repertoire of collective response to its moment



Figure 7.1 Screenshot of Jerry Blossom performing in *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study)*, *After Abramović (1975)*. Produced by Kiam Marcelo Junio, 2012.  
Source and Permission: Kiam Marcelo Junio.

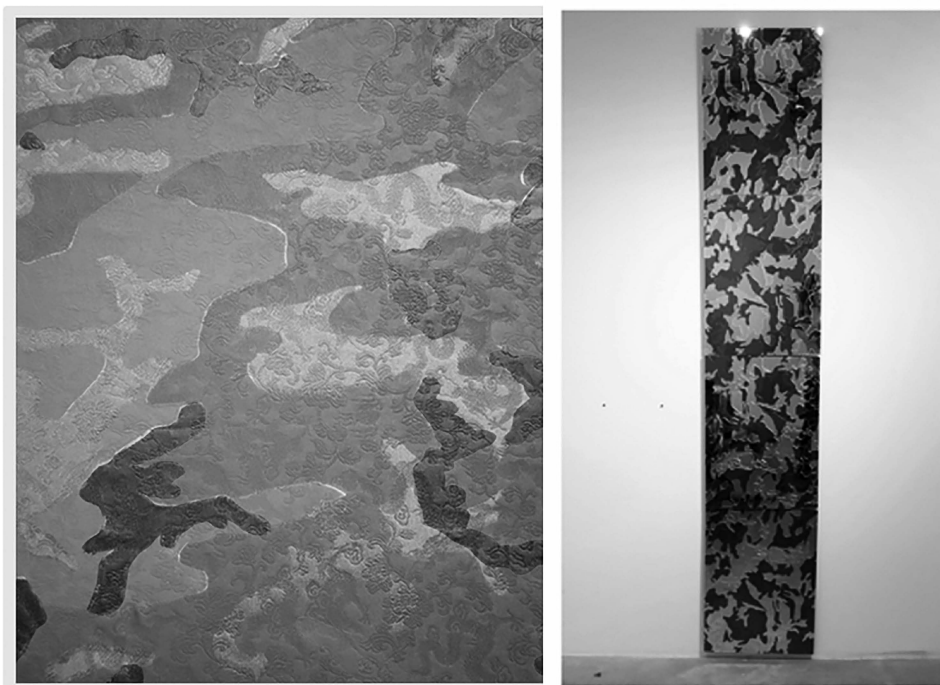


Figure 7.2 *Mimesis I* (2012), metallic ink silkscreen on Chinese silk brocade, 18 × 24 in. (left); *Mimesis II* (2012), mirrored acrylic (in various skin tones), 18 × 24 in. (right).  
Source and Permission: Kiam Marcelo Junio.

and place in the world.”<sup>21</sup> The expressive capital of Junio’s artwork takes a counter-hegemonic form by implicating the agents and actors of U.S.–Philippine relations, including other postcolonial subjects, Filipino, queer, or otherwise, in Jerry Blossom’s provocative performances. I take my discovery of Junio’s *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* on the Internet as a sign of the tactical aesthetic strategy that Junio also deploys in the *Mimesis I & II*. The works are fierce rebuttals to the racial and expressive constraints of the fine arts world imposed upon post-colonial queer artists of color.

For Junio’s work, the Internet makes it possible to produce a disruptive art historical canon that captures Junio harnessing its technological potential in order for queer visibility and formation. That is, Filipino postcolonial queer artists like Junio use online social media platforms as sites for the creation, accumulation, and dissemination of expressive capital through their artwork as well as for social and political transformation. The serendipity involved in my discovery of Junio’s artwork can be read as a consequence of Junio’s tactical act of survival. That is to say, *YouTube* implicates me and other viewers, making possible the knowledge of the artist’s existence and the profound cultural work of their video performance through the potential of endless re-watching.

## DISCOVERY: YOUTUBE AND THE MAKING OF COUNTER-CANONS

With over one billion users and over six billion hours of video watched each month, *YouTube* has become a ubiquitous presence throughout the world.<sup>22</sup> In 2006, *Time* magazine declared “You” as the person of the year, citing *YouTube* as a platform, like *Facebook*, *Wikipedia*, and personal blogs, on which we, as users, worked “like crazy” to create profiles, avatars, blog posts, or book reviews.<sup>23</sup> The advent of Web 2.0 – the catalyst for the social and multimedia explosion online – has created users as laborers, or “playborers,” who expend countless hours of energy using the *World Wide Web* to attain expressive pleasure and to create expressive *and* economic capital.<sup>24</sup> With advancements in the creation of more responsive algorithms for search engines, everything and everyone is seemingly ordered and discoverable.

My discussion of the ubiquity of the Internet in today’s globalized world is to draw attention to the possibilities of discovery online, and more specifically, of platforms like *YouTube*, in what Nicholas Mirzoeff has called “world making.”<sup>25</sup> For the purpose of this chapter, I want to apply Mirzoeff’s term to the ways Filipino postcolonial queer artists like Junio use *YouTube* and other sites as spaces and tools to create artistic canons that often challenge the dominant commercially successful fine artistic canons, becoming themselves what I call *counter-canons*. The sheer ease of discoverability of content, curation, and digital publishing has created the possibilities of alternative “world making” and distinct “expressive capital” that produce repositories of information that stand counter to and challenge modes of sanctioned channels of knowledge production, such as nationally governed websites like the Library of Congress or even Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) sponsored by MIT, Stanford, and other colleges and universities. Postcolonial queer artists like Junio have exploited social new media (mobile) platforms like *YouTube*, *Vimeo*, *Instagram*, and so forth as creative laborers, producing new kinds of “expressive capital.” For Junio,

the Internet affords them the possibility for visibility and facilitates the production of queer new media sociality and queer “world making.” That is to say, Junio’s creative labor online participates in the production of a queer social web, which is critical of hetero-patriarchal normative culture and its epistemological resonance writ large.

The powerful search capabilities of platforms like *YouTube* have inspired generative and exciting experiences despite the quotidian nature of online information. But *YouTube*’s quotidian quality has given artists like Junio the means to create works in their own spaces. They can curate and present video artwork on their own time and to global audiences. Artwork posted online has the potential to be seen across the globe by millions of viewers because of search algorithms that blur the boundaries between and among nations without regard to locality, much like viral videos – those that have been seen by millions of people globally. Yet insofar as viral videos may be examples of the reach of *YouTube* and other video sites, they also often reinforce national, transnational, and diasporic identification practices by viewers depending on the location of their production. Mirzoeff posits that the virality of videos often becomes implicated in new media canonicity – that is, the ossification of a large-scale viewing mandate that builds popularity among a viewing public.<sup>26</sup> This is all to say that this frenetic moment of the global exchanges of information makes possible a heterogeneity of new media identification and disidentificatory practices; the creation of normative and queer social networks; and the ease of digital artistic production and curatorial practices.

It is at this point that I want to take a detour in this chapter to think about the stakes involved specifically in digital curation, especially of Junio’s art practice, the subject of this essay, and more broadly how it represents and interrogates the politics of representation in Filipino drag queen culture. My interest in Junio’s work emerged from my own curatorial practice, which, on a daily basis, involves surveying various websites and collecting images and information for curatorial proposals and scholarly research. I conceptualize the Internet as a rhizome-like repository of information, ever connected through hyperlinks to other sites and multimedia projects and experiences. Using the Internet allows those like Junio and myself, to use Martin Manalansan’s words in his description of Filipino drag queens appropriative cultures, “to play with the world,” being involved in distinct kinds of “world making” via digital and new media.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, this type of queer “world making” is a part of Junio’s tactical act of survival within the digital and new media moment. Such mediated “world making” offers an important intervention in the story of the U.S. imperialism versus Filipino postcolonial identities.

It was during one particular moment of trying to find inspiration for a show that I was curating, *Queer Sites and Sounds*, for the Center for Art and Thought, and I had typed the name in *YouTube*’s search field of the Serb performance artist Marina Abramović, well known for her long-duration performances and whose monumental long-duration performance *The Artist Is Present* (March 14–May 31, 2010) was presented at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York City. I sought inspiration from her work, setting out on this particular day to look for video clips of *Artist Is Present*, unbeknownst to me that my search would yield other performances by Abramović, as well as the work of Kiam Marcelo Junio.

While viewing a clip of Abramović’s *The Artist Is Present*, my eyes wandered to the other *related* works that populated the right sidebar. I had skimmed many



different videos of *The Artist Is Present*, clicking on the related works from the vast performance archive brought up by *YouTube*'s algorithms. *YouTube*'s algorithms had neatly organized other videos of past and contemporary performances by Abramović and other artists and people imitating and reacting to the Abramović's performances that were uploaded. The related video material created an archive of videos of hers and other people's performances. I had moved onto Abramović's iconic 1975 performance *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, and it was during the screening of this video that another related video in particular caught my attention.<sup>28</sup> It was a video created not by her, though the title would indicate that she was its source of inspiration. The video *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* by Kiam Marcelo Junio stood out against the other related videos.<sup>29</sup> The video was clearly inspired by and "a study" of Abramović's original performance as conveyed by its title. My discovery moment became symbolic of how Junio's video through its mere visibility and gender nonconformity – in Junio's rendition, the role of Abramović is played by a drag queen – unsettled the archive of Abramović's performances on *YouTube*.

Abramović's *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, an hour long-duration performance, embarks on a feminist critique of society writ large through Abramović's repeated stroking and brushing of her hair while simultaneously saying "Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful."<sup>30</sup> The performance starts slowly and her utterances, softly; yet overtime, her words become louder and more aggressive as she self-inflicts violence through her combing and brushing actions.

As of the writing of this chapter, several abridged video recordings of versions of Abramović *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful (1975)* have garnered from over 50,000 views to over 130,000 views, and Junio's version has only yielded 134 views. The view counts certainly capture the ways in which the original performance has become part of the canon of performance art – the high view counts set the videos as the benchmarks from which Junio's study emerged. Yet the video rendition by Junio and the paltry 134 views should not be dismissed so quickly. Its inclusion within the panoply of other related Abramović performances speak, I argue, to its subversive potential from its algorithmic presence within the *YouTube* archives. That is, the *YouTube* algorithms created its potential to *pop up* unexpectedly while watching the canonical work by Abramović, helping to unleash its challenge to the canonical work. While Junio's *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* would be perhaps dismissed by the gatekeepers of art history (art historians, patrons, and curators), Junio's performance marks an important point of contact for a queer viewing public. Those 134 views, I argue, signify the important queer cultural work that the video and artist perform to disrupt canon formation (digital, artistic, or otherwise) and to build a queer viewing social web (those who recognize the queer signifiers in Jerry Blossom's rendition), as well as a counter-canon.

Running throughout Junio's visual *oeuvre* is the ability of the artwork to grab the attention of viewers immediately by their use of their body. Junio as Jerry Blossom uses their body to *appropriate* the performance of Abramović's *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* in their redux of the original. In the related thumbnail image, what is shown is Junio as their gender nonconforming drag persona. Jerry Blossom's appearance is a comingling of masculinity and femininity – a hybrid of Junio and Jerry as one – with Jerry Blossom having facial hair and donning a

platinum blond wig. Intrigued by the thumbnail image, I clicked to watch *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)*. This viewing would be my first contact with Junio's artwork, and it would ultimately lead me to the artist's larger artistic archive, specifically to *Mimesis I & II* from their ongoing *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing* series.

## CONTACT: THE COLLISION OF ART AND BODIES

In its most fundamental meaning, *camouflage* is the means to disguise or to transform oneself in order to blend in with one's surroundings. Camouflage, while often used within military parlance, is also used to describe the behavior of various species in the natural world, as a defense mechanism to avoid predatory attacks. The term takes on a particular resonance when applied to Junio and their art. In their video performance *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)*, Junio recuperates Abramović's original performance in drag within the domestic space of their apartment. In that particular moment and time, Junio is their own audience; they can only see themselves on their laptop. Unlike Abramović, who by the release of the original *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* in 1975 had already garnered international recognition – and a certain canonical acceptance – for her often daring solo performances, Junio's status in 2012, the year their video performance was produced, was that of an art school student. Junio's potential wider recognition emerged after their decision to post their video performance on *YouTube*.

Their performance of the redux of Abramović's piece in drag and more broadly their conceptualization of *camouflage* or *camouflaging*, I argue, is influenced by their experiences as a Filipino postcolonial queer sailor during the era of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) and the various location(s) within the Filipino diaspora that Junio traversed.<sup>31</sup> Serving seven years prior to the abolishment of DADT, Junio likely masked their gender presentation and sexuality by blending physically, materially, and affectively through the act of camouflage within their military surroundings. Camouflaging in this sense is both performative (Junio's adherence to rigid military etiquette and aesthetics) as well as a mode of gender(ed) discipline in the Foucauldian sense (the demarcation of sexual and gendered boundaries between men and women in the Navy).<sup>32</sup> The adherence to or a performance of a masculine gender was expected of Junio while they were in the military.

Junio created *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* in 2012. Using the G.I. Bill that they earned serving in the U.S. Navy to partially fund their art school education, their use of the military benefit reveals (ironically) the tactical maneuverings of the artist. It is during their experience at SAIC that they began to challenge the rigid binaries of gender, masculinity, and femininity, turning instead to genderqueer identification practices and opting to use the third person gender pronouns: "they, their, them."<sup>33</sup>

Compared to the black-and-white film footage of Abramović performing *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, Junio's version was filmed in their home. In the original version, a nude Abramović starts slowly brushing her hair and deliberately repeating the phrase "Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful." The long-duration piece of the original lasts 60 minutes and culminates in Abramović using the comb through her hair in violent strokes much like a weapon. She also uses

the comb to scratch her face, violently, all the while repeating “Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful.” Junio’s rendition intervenes in the original staging of performance, marking their space, affect, and body as Other.

Viewers of Junio’s study are exposed to Jerry Blossom in a dimly lit room – wearing a platinum blond wig, black beaded necklace, and black tank top. If the reconfiguration of Abramović’s video occurs immediately, then so too does the camouflaging tactic deployed by Junio. The long-durational video, 43 minutes in total, pictures Junio layered in drag. From wig to clothing, Jerry Blossom is presenting to viewers a queer (i.e., non-normative, gender variant) image of themselves, powerfully signified by the phrase “Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful.” Unlike Abramović who performs in the nude in a nondescript space, Jerry Blossom uses the domestic space of the kitchen, wears a blond wig, and dons a feminine outfit to signify their feminine persona as well as to mark their domestic space as a space for their queer artistic production – and as a space in which postcolonial queer expressive labor and world making happens. For Junio, it is the art of drag that must be beautiful. And it is drag that queers the hetero-patriarchal normative spaces of the domestic.

The layered vision of Jerry Blossom in wig and outfit points to Junio’s strategy of camouflaging in their attempts to blend into the domestic sphere. Yet their drag appearance suggests that Junio does not fully submit to the assimilative or mimetic demands of gender normativity (within the sphere of U.S. empire). That is, Junio’s performance and appearance remain in an inchoate state – Junio conveys to their viewers that Jerry Blossom is enacting a form of gender nonconformity. Jerry Blossom in their seductive voice repeats: “Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful,” appropriating it from the original performance, but conveying to viewers its assimilative imperatives. Through Jerry Blossom’s performance, they tactically misrecognize the hail of gender assimilative demands of masculine and feminine gender imperatives. Such a tactical misrecognition, as José Muñoz writes, “permits a subject to demystify the dominant publicity, exposing it as a ‘discursively pre-constituted’ space that often maintains strict and oppressive hierarchies within the social.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Jerry Blossom captures the unmooring of gender, aligning with Judith Butler’s claim: “This ‘being a man’ and this ‘being a woman’ are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification.”<sup>35</sup>

Jerry Blossom’s performance is not marked by a direct parity between original and copy. She does not use a brush, but rather uses their fingers to brush through her blond wig – a mode of *kamayan*, Tagalog for use of one’s hands. Moreover, when speaking “Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful,” Jerry Blossom speaks in a Filipino accent. The violent repertoire found in the original Abramović performance is noticeably absent in Junio’s rendition. Indeed, there is a sense of subdued seduction and tactical subtlety in their performance that is missing in the original video. The staging, affect, and performance of the video, I argue, are variants of the act of camouflage within the domestic sphere, influencing Junio’s performance and gender nonconformity in their presentation. While the performance of Junio’s in *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* reveals a certain degree of mimetic demands from the original video, it, more importantly, captures the improbability of the postcolonial subject to transform into the image of the colonizer. The video disrupts the ideals of the colonial *gendered* order of bodies, objects, and things. In his description of Filipino gay immigrants, Martin Manalansan writes: “[They] are not

passively assimilating into a mature or self-realized state of gay modernity, but rather contesting the boundaries of gay identity and rearticulating its modern contours.”<sup>36</sup> Junio’s performance is actively capturing the consequences – that is, the often violent gender demands – and not merely submitting to gender and sexual normative forces that emerge from colonialism and acted upon the Filipino queer postcolonial body.

Jerry Blossom’s performance aligns to Sarita See’s assessment of Filipinos being “foreign in the domestic sense.”<sup>37</sup> For Junio, markers of foreignness are not hidden, rather they are exposed through their gender presentation and performance. The domestic space of the dining room, and more broadly the home, becomes a metonym for the larger hetero-patriarchal normative domestic landscape of the United States; their presence is symbolic of the extent to which camouflaging becomes a necessary but limited tactic of survival within the domestic front. In the military, the practice of camouflaging is used during combative situations. In the video, Junio’s use of camouflage is more than just a metaphor for passing, as the titles of their later works would suggest, but rather it signifies an act of defiance rather than submission. Camouflaging in the Junio video reveals its combative impulse, one directed against the constraints of the art world and of the U.S. empire placed on queer artists of color like Junio.

### AFTERMATH: MIMESIS I & II FROM CAMOUFLAGE AS A METAPHOR FOR PASSING SERIES

By way of a conclusion, I want to end by looking at two artistic pieces by Junio entitled *Mimesis I* & *Mimesis II* from their ongoing *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing* series. Created in 2012, *Mimesis I* & *II* align with the Junio’s ethos of exploring the notion of camouflaging as a survival tactic. Like the video, *Mimesis I* & *Mimesis II* do not offer complete fidelity to the original. The two works offer distinct and colorful variations of the aesthetics of camouflage often associated with military uniforms; Junio even appropriates the patterns found on camouflage fatigues. Junio’s *Mimesis I* & *II* are mimetically inspired by their reference to camouflage uniforms, yet do not conform identically to the original source. The artist offers a queer reconfiguration of the referent, re-signifying camouflage as non-normative and branding a queer political ethos onto the very term: *mimesis*.

While the term *mimesis* refers fundamentally to an imitative practice, the two works in *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing* series also offer up the possibility of socio-cultural and political intervention and change through their very conceptual and compositional framing. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one meaning of “*mimesis*” defines it as “the deliberate imitation of the behavior of one group of people by another as a factor in social change.” *Mimesis I* & *II* reconfigures the viewing practices of their audience, and in doing so, the work conveys to their viewers the stakes involved in both the act of camouflaging, the materiality of camouflage, and the relationship between the postcolonial queer body and camouflage. The pieces demand viewers to take closer inspection of the works.

If *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study)*, *After Abramović (1975)* plays on the long-durational and potentially repetitive imitative performance by Junio, then *Mimesis I* & *II* may also be read against a temporal framework. I argue that Junio’s service in the U.S.

Navy can be read as a long-durational performance for the artist, especially in light of pre-DADT repeal. While their life-experiences spent over a course of seven years in the military inspired their turn to military aesthetics in their series *Camouflage as a Metaphor Passing*, their experiences also served as formative grounding for their durational performances. Harkening back to the definition of mimesis as a means for social change, the two *Mimesis* pieces convey conceptual and temporal challenges to their viewers – ones that demand viewers to consider the queer materiality, especially in relation to bodies found within the military.

In *Mimesis I*, Junio presents a highly stylized, abstract camouflage pattern using Oriental silk brocade. The resulting piece draws viewers visually and viscerally into the frame to get a sense of the labor Junio expended on creating the brocade patterns and their careful placements. It is this act of moving closer to inspect and linger on the pattern and brocade work that must be read as a temporal gesture. This gesture for viewers to move closer to inspect the work is evidence of Junio's queer hail that they formally embed into the work to create the piece. That is to say, the piece itself immerses viewers into its queer frame, a conceptual *and* compositional decision that is also reflected literally in *Mimesis II*, a four-panel columnar installation created using laser-cut, mirrored, colored acrylic.

Junio's strategy of drawing viewers into the frame is similarly captured in *Mimesis II*. In it, Junio returns to the camouflage pattern. They use laser-cut acrylic to create the patterns out of the skin-toned colored material. If *Mimesis I* presents a queer reconfiguration of the camouflage military aesthetic through Junio's colorful, if not campy Warhol-esque silk brocade pattern construction, *Mimesis II* queers by directly implicating the viewer within the panels through its reflective properties – one sees oneself within each of the separate laser-cut mirrored acrylic pieces. Each of the mirrored patterned panels reproduces the viewers' reflections, drawing them into the piece – indeed, demanding them to scrutinize the artwork, but more importantly, to recognize themselves within the camouflaging. In short, *Mimesis II* implicates viewers through the mirror effect. If camouflaging is about hiding oneself in plain sight, *Mimesis II* disrupts the function of camouflaging by revealing rather than concealing the viewers of the installation. It is through the reflective aspect of *Mimesis II* that ultimately disrupts normative expectations of camouflaging. *Mimesis II* draws its viewers within its frames and literally inscribes them on the artwork's surface.

\* \* \*

My readings of *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)* and *Mimesis I & II* within the *Camouflage as a Metaphor for Passing* series capture richly layered postcolonial strategies of survival for Kiam Marcelo Junio. Junio appropriates the military term and act of camouflaging, I have argued, as an ironic tactical act that enables Junio to survive artistically and personally. The military legacies of the United States in the Philippines also inspire Junio's recuperation of military aesthetics and vernacular, highlighting the colonizing forces of the United States in the islands and throughout the diaspora. Junio's postcolonial conceptual and compositional repertoire, as well as a queering of self-representation through Jerry Blossom, as I have argued, cannot be separated from their experiences in the military. These

life experiences have inspired strategies of mimesis, whether through mimicry of the performance artist Marina Abramović or through the reappropriation of the camouflaging military patterns. Ironically, Junio's pieces don't hide in plain sight, as camouflaging would imply; rather, they command presence and visibility. Junio re-signifies the act and the production of camouflage, reframing it as a critical mode of interrogation of that which are seen and unseen, a politics tied to the very conditions and forces that define the artist's existence.

## ENDNOTES

1. Prior to living in Chicago, Kiam Marcelo Junio lived in the Philippines, Japan, California, and Spain. In keeping with Junio's identification as genderqueer, I use their preferred gender third-person pronouns: "they," "their," "them" throughout this chapter.
2. Junio writes: "I identify as both genderqueer and queer, but prefer the term gender-nonconforming (under the umbrella of transgender, arguably under the larger umbrella of queer)." Kiam Marcelo Junio, e-mail message to author, September 22, 2014.
3. "About," accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.iamkiam.com/about.html>. The term genderqueer, synonymous with gender nonconformity, exceeds the expectations of the binary masculinity and femininity. It embraces the fluidity of gender and challenges gender normativity. See Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins, eds., *GenderQueer: Voices From Beyond the Sexual Binary* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2002).
4. See Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991); Catherine Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); "Philippines to Give U.S. Forces Access to up to Five Military Bases." *Reuters*, May 2, 2014, accessed May 1, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/02/us-philippines-usa-idUSBREA4107020140502>
5. Sarita See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xi–xii.
6. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.
7. See Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *Straitjacket Sexualities: Unbinding Asian American Manhoods in the Movies* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Nguyen Tan Hoang, *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
8. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 2nd ed., 1995).
9. *Ibid.*, 136.
10. There have been many studies on how photography, film, and other forms of mechanical reproducible images proved effective in advancing colonial projects and colonial understandings of the Philippines and Filipinos. See, for example, Benito Vergara, *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in Early 20th-Century Philippines* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1996); Abe Ignacio, Enrique de la Cruz, Jorge Emmanuel, and Helen Toribio, *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons* (San Francisco: T-Boli Publishing, 2004); Nerissa Balce, "The Filipina's Breast: Savagery, Docility, and the Erotics of the American Empire." *Social Text* 24 (Summer 2006): 89–110.
11. See *Bontoc Eulogy*, prod. and dir. Marlon Fuentes, 56 min., NAATA, 1995, videocassette.
12. Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and Their Social Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 6.

13. I am taken by Ann Stoler's work on the contradictions inherent in the governance of colonial domesticity and "the colonial state's investment in knowledge about the carnal" in late-nineteenth century Dutch West Indies. Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 6–7.
14. Jan Christian Bernabe, "Queer Reconfigurations: *Bontoc Eulogy* and Marlon Fuentes's Archive Imperative." *Positions: Asia Critique* 24.4 (forthcoming).
15. For a discussion of "Filipino American cultural moment," see Sarita See, *The Decolonized Eye*, xxxi.
16. *Ibid.*, xxxi.
17. *Ibid.*, xi.
18. José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press: New York, 2009), 1.
19. For discussions on the masculine gaze, photography, and westward expansion during the nineteenth century, see Aleta Ringlero "Prairie Pinups: Reconsidering Historic Portraits of American Indian Women." In *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, ed. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (New York: International Center of Photography, 2003), 183–197. Laura Wexler interrogates the gendered dynamics of U.S. empire, and more specifically the ways in which women were, like their male counterparts, invested in advancing U.S. imperial projects during the nineteenth and early twentieth century through photography. See Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
20. Kiam Marcelo Junio, e-mail message to author, September 22, 2014.
21. Machida, *Unsettled Visions*, 6.
22. "Statistics," accessed September 1, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>
23. Lev Grossman, "You – Yes, You – Are TIME's Person of the Year." *Time*, December 25, 2006, accessed September 1, 2014. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>
24. My use "playborer" is influenced by Julian Kücklich's article "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry." In the article, Kücklich distinguishes the precarious boundaries of "modding" (or game modification) as practices of unpaid labor and leisure play, calling attention to the hybrid term "playbour." Julian Kücklich, "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry." *The Fiberculture Journal*, 2005, accessed June 12, 2015. <http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarious-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/>
25. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), 224.
26. *Ibid.*, 243.
27. Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 126.
28. Marina Abramović documented her performances, outlining the material and the directions for each. For her 1975 performance of *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* at the Charlottenburg Art Festival in Copenhagen, Denmark, the directions for the piece were: "I brush my hair with a metal brush in my right hand and simultaneously comb my hair with a metal comb in my left hand. While doing so, I continuously repeat 'Art must be Beautiful, artist must be beautiful' until I hurt my face and damage my hair." Klaus Peter Biesenbach, *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 80–81.
29. For the complete video, see *Art Must Be Beautiful (Study), After Abramović (1975)*, accessed September 1, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w84wDhdFDIA>

30. For a feminist critique of Abramović's *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, see for example Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists* (Palgrave: New York, 2010), 83.
31. Signed into official policy by President Bill Clinton in 1994, DADT was eliminated in 2011 by President Barack Obama.
32. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).
33. Michael Schulman, "Generation LGBTQIA." *New York Times*, January 9, 2013, accessed September 1, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/fashion/generation-lgbtqia.html>
34. José Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 168–169.
35. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 126.
36. Manalansan, *Global Divas*, x.
37. See, *The Decolonized Eye*, xi.

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