

# Review of: "The Aesthetic of the Nakikibakang Loob: Kiri Dalena's Militant and Transcendent Art"

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The reviewed article expounds a characteristic aspect, maybe the characteristic aspect, of Kiri Dalena's art. Being an activist, Kiri Dalena (further on: KD) wants to show us the reality of suffering in order to stir the viewers up and make them ready to defend the suffering. This is, of course, not very characteristic but crucial for any kind of realism, starting with Hugo, Dickens, Gogol, and many others. What is specific is that she makes the suffering person's face the starting point, and that contemplating it can make us recognize the suffering as a *kapwang tao*, an experience that can reach our very loob. Here, she is close especially to Levinas' concept of the face of the Other, which has authority over us and forbids us, particularly in its helplessness, to make the Other an object, for sure, of cruelty, but also of benevolence that objectivates the Other. In this way, she avoids a risk of realistic art, that it might still see somebody as an object, a person with whom I have little in common and whom I first objectivate in order to analyze the person's situation and then organize help. This might be what people did while listening to "La Traviata," or what happens when people hang copies of Picasso's "Guernica" in their pleasant living rooms: in a way, they are just happy the persons shown are not really to be experienced as *kapwang tao* but are far away, which, of course, does not stop us from donating for the needs of victims of war, violence, etc. By making clear it is not like this, KD shows that in the synthetic and relational Filipino ontology (I am using this word here, not having a better one), there is no hiatus between the *kapwang tao* and the loob, they are not two entities that must somehow be brought together, but they are already in a way indivisible, or they can be divided only artificially, by an analyzing Western viewpoint (like in the case of the old American photographs that stir her up). Insofar, it would seem helpful to me if the author went more in-depth to see what KD's contemplation of the world has in common with, in particular, Levinas, and what separates them. Besides, it would be interesting to study in how far KD was or is influenced not only by a Filipino perspective but also by Spanish ways of seeing the suffering, like in the Black Nazarene tradition or others that stress the closeness between the devotee and Christ suffering. For sure, the suffering of the *kapwang tao* can only be understood fully if we understand our own view: what in it is biblical, Christian, Asian, Socialist, etc. Finally, I am sure the author's further studies will see KD in the broader context of Filipino aesthetics. In doing so, the author will be able to present broadly, to people in both the East and the West, how activism and aesthetics are interrelated not only in KD, but in a broad range of Filipino art.