

HIRAYA GALLERY: A STUDY ON ITS SIGNIFICANCE BASED ON FILIPINO PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper determines the significance of Hiraya Gallery as an art institution based on Filipino's perceptions. Using the Grounded Theory approach, five interviews were conducted for this study to assess the gallery's significance. For the rationale of this study, Hiraya Gallery was chosen for its renowned determination and commitment to artistic integrity. There are a few art galleries that envision the development of Filipino artists. Hiraya Gallery appears to be significant because of its strong advocacy for Philippine culture and cultivating talent.

Keywords: Philippines, art gallery, business, culture

1 INTRODUCTION

The mission of Hiraya Gallery is to promote the advancement of contemporary Philippine visual arts by welcoming new Filipino artists with aesthetic capabilities (Au, 1997). It is a whole new way of seeing the visual arts as sacred and not considered as a mere object. In the Philippine art world, selling local art is a patronization in which the talent of the artist is guided towards excellence (Valenciano, 2002). According to Chong (2001), it is of great importance to look at the three commitments of an art manager: 1.) commitment to excellence and artistic integrity; 2.) commitment to accessibility and audience development; and 3.) commitment to cost effectiveness and public accountability. These three commitments are applicable to different types of art organizations addressing the managerial and economic issues in the industry.

2 ART AS BUSINESS

Art galleries are forms of business experiencing economic pressures and intense competition (Dean, 1998). They have become more complex as an industry (Fopp, 1997). Galleries confront these intense competitions through management style and working as an entity. It functions to converse with clients, organize relevant data regarding the process of selling art, and set up shows which are helpful for the advancement of aspiring visual artists (Cassar, 1998). Moreover, there are three types of galleries: 1.) pioneering galleries that are self-supporting; 2.) commercial galleries that only work with the best artists because of commodity; and 3.) interior decorator galleries dealing only with paintings that are pleasing to the spectator's eye, especially when it is highly regarded as a trend (Cassar, 1998). As an important part of culture and economics, galleries define ethical business standards in the industry (Dean, 1998). Cooperation between the artist and art manager encourages them to be more innovative and prolong their efficiency in the market (Caplin, 1998).

Most of art enthusiasts have high levels of education (Gans, 1999).

They participate in high cultural pursuits, and prefers cultural and educational programs over light entertainment (Blackall & Meek, 1992). Mayuga (1992) stated that "A gallery is a place of vision and enriching exchange and not just a space for hanging artworks for sale." The mission of art is to criticize modern society and to rationalize aesthetics by exploring the possibilities of different artistic media (Gans, 1999). The mass production of art commodities in which popular culture is based on, caused art to lose its value and its privileged position in society (Adorno, 1991). It increased art commercialism and exploitation of artistic knowledge. It is impossible to predict the commercial of individual arts products because it is dependent on mass consumption (Blackall & Meek, 1992). Producers do not have much control over this process because in popular culture, creative activity lies in consumption (Caplin, 1998). Since art organizations produce aesthetic meanings rather than finished products, that aesthetic meaning has to be transformed into a popular meaning in order to gain commercial success (Fiske, 1990). This is where popular culture enters the scene wherein the public's tastes are being recognized. The artist is forced to create a work to gain profit instead of creating out of inspiration (Brynes, 2003).

Artists and art organizations had to confront the pressures of the internal and external environments. For any planning process to succeed, the organization must have a clear decision-making process in order to be effective managers (Allison & Kaye, 2003). This identifies problems to be solved and utilize resources to implement solutions. By formulating goals and establishing specific objectives, it fulfills the mission of the organization to attain future success (Allison & Kaye, 2003). The process of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of an organization identifies the trends in the environment (Mintzberg, 1994). Actions can be taken to expand the positive trends and minimize the impact of the negative ones (Hill et al., 2003). As practitioners in the industry, art managers are essentially aware of the market value, have broader knowledge as well as the confidence to be competent in the art business (Caplin, 1998).

3 HIRAYA GALLERY

Hiraya Gallery was established in October 1980 in Manila and started out as a frame shop (Hiraya Gallery, n.d.). Towards the end of Martial Law, the nation has reached its economic, social, and political austerity and also gave rise to art advocacy (Mayuga, 1992). *Hiraya* is an old Visayan term for 'imagination' (Cruz & Kahn-Parreño, 2024). According to Deriada (2005), it is also called *kīnaray-a* that was derived from several names such as *Karay-a*, *Kaday-a*, or *Hīnaraya*. It is the mother language or the lingua franca of the Western Visayas spoken

mainly in Iloilo, Antique and Capiz (Cordero, 2019). The development of this language is an early example of how colonial mentality works and how economic and cultural power can shape its language (Villanueva, 2023). *Hiligaynon* was developed through the Chinese in Molo, Iloilo's Chinatown (Delos Santos, 2003). The natives spoke Kinaray-a and accommodated the linguistic deficiencies of the foreigners instead of forcing the Chinese to master the language (Delos Santos, 2003). Developed to be the language by the elite of Chinese and Spanish mestizos, *Kinaray-a* lost its position and dignity as the mother language where it became associated with the lower classes in the society (Delos Santos, 2003).

According to Au (1997), Hiraya Gallery's vision is "to develop and encourage unknown Filipino artists not because they are commercially viable, but because of their individual inspiration and vision." Hiraya Gallery does not collect under the criteria of the artist's name, subject matter, and visual impact but on the bearing that they wish to attain (Veloira, 1992). The gallery has its own formula for selecting its artists wherein the process involves analysis of recent and past artworks, assessment of the artist's present concerns, and prefers to see the partial collection first before an exhibition (Veloira, 1992). It evaluates a painting by 1.) the head, to think or would "connote the intellectual part or how the work conveys what the artist is trying to say"; 2.) the heart, to feel something about their "painting in making viewers feel the emotion"; and 3.) the hand, requiring the skill or craftsmanship (Gusto, 1999). If one is lacking from the 3 H's, then the painting will not be meaningful. Hiraya Gallery is best known for its regional artists, where it is called as a "haven for Cordillera art" (Arriola, 1992). Artists are at its best not be commercialized and most used media as a medium of gaining popularity from the uninformed public (Au, 1997). Hiraya Gallery's primary goal is to assure that the artists could sell their several artworks (Lerma, 2007). The artworks that would remain unsold and will be exhibited in the gallery, carefully observed and have undergone a critical analysis for its intrinsic quality and relevance (Veloira, 1992).

4 ARTISTS

Hiraya Gallery's choice in art collection is a big factor for its reputation. One artist is devoted to his fascination for cultural lifestyles. Lakan Ilaw is a Binangonan artist who simplifies the extremities of life through the portrayal of joyful Filipino faces and festivity wonders (Santos, 2008). Lakan Ilaw's work, *Mamaya, Si San Miguel Naman* (Figure 1) is quite powerful that it silently beckons spirituality and imagination. The devoted men are carrying the image of the Santo Niño under the scorching sun. Lakan Ilaw's exhibit was entitled as *Debosyon*, which means professing strong faith for spiritual guidance by means of celebrating as one community (Hiraya, n.d.). His works are mostly done in thick lines and shapes, which transforms into a real countenance of ordinary townsfolk (Santos, 2008).

According to Doloricon (2005), expression is essential for every artist. Renato Habulan, a Social-Realist artist who is famous for his works such as *Kagampan* (Figure 2) and *Dulang Bayan* (Constantino, 2009). Both works reflected the uproar of political angst and poverty during the Marcos' regime (de Torres, 2025). Habulan was part of an activist movement called *Kaisahan*, which became a driving force to

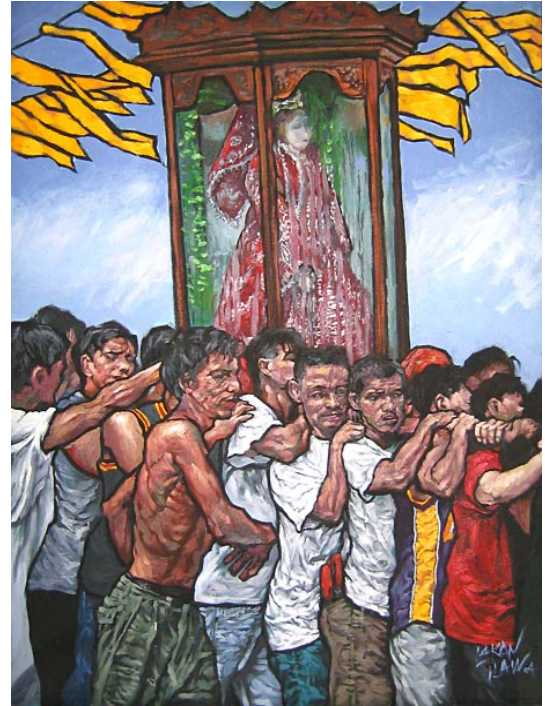


Fig. 1. Lakan Ilaw. *Mamaya, Si San Miguel Naman*, n.d. Oil on canvas.



Fig. 2. Renato Habulan, *Kagampan*. 1980. Oil on canvas.

cultivate freedom for artists and voice out their opinions on societal issues (de Torres, 2025). Through the process of painting with magnificent choices of technique, their works convey the realities of life based on their own personal experiences.

Another artist, José Legaspi, has been known for his morbid subjects and the intensive usage of monochromatic mediums (Antoinette, 2008). Legaspi's *Blood Wish* where a woman's umbilical cord is exteriorly connected to her own offspring and at the same time holding the child by its neck with her right hand (Hiraya, n.d.). Gripping on a sharp-pointed knife on her left hand, she intends to stab her child on the head without an emotional guilt on her face. It signifies abortion and sin. Sin is destruction of human relationships and to constantly dwell on malevolence (Tsui, 1999). Art lovers can consider such themes as too sinister and cannot withstand the vivid realities of life (Antoinette, 2008). Every artist's motive or purpose is to capture the riddle behind their work. The image can be alluding or complex however, it might not have a meaning at all (Navasero, 2013). The best way is to simply ask the artist who is the mastermind of its perplexity.

Outsiders such as Bobby Nuestro, an abstract expressionist and gallery owner of *A.R.i.A.S.* (Artist-Run Independent Art Space), which serves as a venue for contemporary works (A.R.i.A.S., n.d.). It is also affiliated with *Grupo Reposo*, a group of galleries among urban communities who stands for individualism through visual arts (Calleja, 2013). *Reposo* means "to repose" or to rest (Martinez, 2009). Nuestro selects works based on aesthetics and relevance but with potential commercial value. Jethro Jocson and Arnel Ramiscal are also artists at *A.R.i.A.S.* focusing on conceptualism and expressionism (A.R.i.A.S., n.d.). According to Yap (2024), Jocson is known for his multicolored surrealist themes that is thought-provoking and captures the viewer's imagination (Figure 3). Ramiscal is a modernist painter who creates in abstract form and paints to express himself rooted from his everyday life (Bautista, 2009). Moreover, he believes that spiritual guidance is a coping mechanism in the midst of mental pressures. Thus, his creative process is elevated (Bautista, 2009).



Fig. 3. Jethro Jocson. *Untitled*, n.d. Oil on canvas.

5 METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The nature and design used in this research is qualitative. It is descriptive in a form of case study that will analyze Hiraya Gallery's strengths and weaknesses as an arts organization. The gathering of data will include interviews, observations, focus group discussions and archival research. Using the Grounded Theory approach will determine the significance of Hiraya Gallery as an art institution based on artists' perceptions (Mace & Ward, 2002).

Below is the table that represents the analysis of Hiraya Gallery's significance (Figure 4). Its strengths are assessed in this context from several viewpoints from the five respondents.

Name	Age	Evaluations on the Significance of Hiraya Gallery
Renato Habulan (Artist)	56	Hiraya Gallery helped the artists to express their political angst against Martial Law during the 1980s. As a tool for the advancement of Philippine culture, artists were cultivated at Hiraya Gallery.
Bobby Nuestro (Gallery Owner)	38	Hiraya Gallery is known for exhibiting Oriental works. Hiraya Gallery advocates for Philippine products to champion Filipino identity.
Lalyn Buncab (Curator)	33	Hiraya Gallery has excellent criteria for selecting artworks. It's not the quantity or the number of artworks that is important, but the quality itself. This includes the skill of the artist, the artist's concept, and its passion for their profession.
Jethro Jocson (Artist)	32	Hiraya Gallery has a market outside the Philippines. This is an advantage because Hiraya Gallery stands out to different parts of Asia to promote Philippine culture.
Arnel Ramiscal (Artist)	34	Hiraya Gallery is surrounded by travel agencies. This gives tourists the opportunity to be educated with Philippine art and culture. Spirituality is essential for the artist's sense of well-being and health. This enhances their creative process to be more aesthetically competent.

Fig. 4. Interview evaluation and assessment

a. Renato Habulan's Views

Habulan stated that Hiraya Gallery addressed the problems of artists during the Martial Law period, particularly the Anti-Subversion Law. It was a prohibition of producing any forms of objects that could signify a rebellion or opposition against the Marcos' administration (de Torres, 2025). This includes posters, written documents and exhibition of paintings or sculptures. Art galleries at that time were apprehended by this law. Social-Realist art was considered 'subversive' because it depicted paintings from everyday life that could represent a particular situation in the society (Flores, 2013). This includes poverty, emotional distress, economic downfall, political angst, and anything that reflects with societal confrontations of everyday living. Social-Realists have experienced the harsh realities of life and used these themes as a source of inspiration (Flores, 2013). Habulan further believes that the gallery's contribution to Philippine art boldly faced the political danger during the Martial Law period. They welcomed these artists despite the implementation of the law by the Marcos' administration.

b. Bobby Nuestro's Views

Nuestro believes in art capitalism in order for artists to survive the industry. Capital is the most essential tool to enter into the art scene and elevate their success (Blackall & Meek, 1992). He further stressed that audience affects the art business because the artists rely on them for their source of income. Skills are also critical in order for the artists to survive in the art scene (Duldulao, 1997). Hiraya Gallery promoted regional artworks to influence and educate about Filipino culture. The gallery is also diverse by exhibiting Asian contemporary art. In addition, these Oriental works are done by Filipino artists who traveled and explored in several Asian countries namely China, Singapore and Thailand (Hiraya, n.d.). Moreover, they promoted Filipino identity by tracing back the artwork's origin from different regions in the country (Arriola, 1992).

c. Lalyn Buncab's Views

Lalyn Buncab is the curator at the *De La Salle University Museum* (Mistades, 2011). She has been inclined in the visual arts along her entire life and passionate in the field of arts education (Cariga & Artis, 2014). According to Buncab, Hiraya Gallery has a unique management style and strives as an organization to shape the innovation of Filipino artists. It serves as a commitment to preserve cultural heritage. The gallery is not after the quantity of artworks, but for its quality. Its objective is not only to sell but to exhibit paintings with beauty and charm (Au, 1997). Every artwork has its own personal content and significance. The artist's statement is very important as it extends to their philosophy in life.

d. Jethro Jocson's Views

According to Jocson, artists today lack a statement where commercialism is at odds with authenticity. The artist's statement is very critical as it serves as the inner soul and direction of their work (Dean, 1998). Without it, the market cannot comprehend what the artist is trying to convey with their message (Kavanagh, 1990). Jocson stressed that there's an unethical practice due to improper allocation of income between the artist and dealer. The artist does not get informed or is unaware that their painting has already been sold. There will always be a conflict or a friction among the artist, dealer, and the artwork (Fopp, 1997). An artist must not rely on one gallery alone and have other jobs aside from painting (De Jesus, 1992). He also echoes that the gallery has a good strategy of building a reputation by having a market outside of the Philippines (Hiraya Gallery Deutschland, n.d.). Thus, it stands out to different countries by promoting Filipino artists and be recognized in the art world. The gallery retains their standards during the selection process, which leaves an indelible mark of Filipino identity.

e. Arnel Ramiscal's Views

Ramiscal does not use technology as his artistic medium and stays connected with nature to enhance his creative process. According to Ramiscal, the location of the gallery also impacts the target market. In addition, the gallery is surrounded by travel agencies in United Nations in Ermita, Manila (Cruz, 2024). Tourists are encouraged to witness these Filipino-oriented

paintings. Since galleries exist to educate the public, foreigners will have the opportunity to learn from Filipino culture and to widely express it as a symbolism of pride (Cruz, 2024)

6 RESULTS

The results show that Hiraya Gallery's vision, mission, and concept made them significant as an art institution (Figure 5). According to the five respondents of this study, Hiraya Gallery is significant because: 1.) they advocated for artists to freely create and continued to foster their talent; 2.) diversified their collection by exhibiting works from various heritage; 3.) set criteria for selecting artworks; 4.) built a market outside of the Philippines to promote Filipino culture, and 5.) educating the public through their venues.

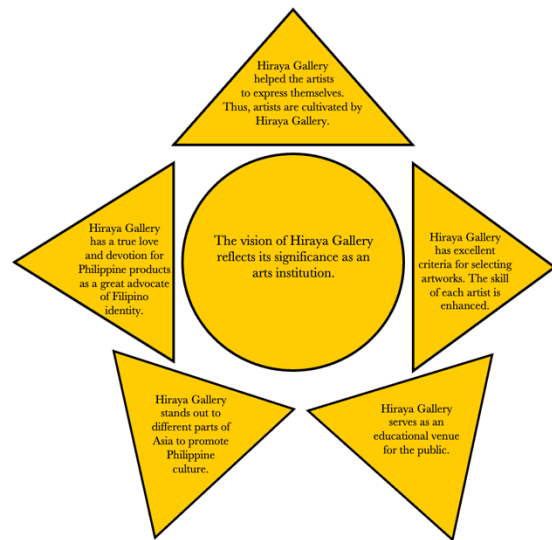


Fig. 5. Framework on Hiraya Gallery's significance

The overall analysis for the interview showed evidence of artist-dealer issues and art commercialism. According to the respondents, they were still able to sustain their financial struggles as they have other sources of income. Yet, not all artists are sufficient enough to consider painting as the solution to their problems. The promotional expenses are being paid by the artist himself (De Jesus, 1992). The gallery only serves as the venue and may also be the source of conflict if the terms and conditions of the sale are not satisfied (Caplin, 1998).

7 IMPLICATIONS ON ARTIST-DEALER RELATIONSHIPS

The need for survival in artist-dealer relationships is one specific issue of art organizations (Caplin, 1998). Both the dealer and artist have mutual partnership in the art gallery business. According to Brynes (2003), an artist in the world of business or a manager in the world of the arts is often lost. They easily become disoriented and frustrated and thus, losing the commonality of interest (Byrnes, 2003). The artist's lack of motivation to create due to financial need may have the possibility to lose his creative process (Cassar, 1998). The true potential of the artist remains unused. The most common danger that serves as a threat between the two parties is when the division of sales and expenses becomes the root cause of misunderstanding (Caplin,

1998) When an artist is becoming known to the public and their works are in demand, the situation eventually becomes difficult to decide in financial terms (Fopp, 1997). Basic philosophy and integrity of both parties bind a long-lasting relationship to acquire honest benefits (Mace & Ward, 2003).

An artist's life is not easy because they depend on their art to survive (De Jesus, 1992). The state of mind of the artist to create that comes from their inspirational soul, becomes distracted because their mentality is shifted towards income (Caplin, 1998). Capital is the means for survival due to the Philippines' economic decline (Duldulao, 1997). Gallery owners and dealers operate in a for-profit business model in which its primary objective is to collect and sell (Byrnes, 2003). Some art managers will also select works based on the artist's potential and skills yet with possible greater commercial value (Blackall & Meek, 1992). A "struggling painter was employed by an art gallery owner and dealer to produce works on a salary basis" (De Jesus, 1992). The usual percentage between the gallery and the artist is 60%-40% (Byrnes, 2003). When the artwork of the artist is sold, 60% of the income goes to them, while there is a gallery price left for the dealer (Byrnes, 2003). In the Philippines, artists are responsible for their own marketing such as cocktails, invitations, and promotions for the exhibit (Duldulao, 1997). The preparation must be presented to appease buyers and collectors. Artists also pay 40% of the Value Added Tax (V.A.T.) that adds up to their financial burden and barely making the ends meet (Duldulao, 1998).

The general public do not prioritize art as the answer to their basic needs however, art collectors and enthusiasts are the primary supporters (Duldulao, 1997). Others patrons would prefer purchasing from an established name, in which the commercial value is put into a much greater importance over the aesthetic value (Davidmann, 1988). Thus, it tends to affect the creative process of the artist (Mace & Ward, 2003). It also affects their health by relying on vices such as drinking and smoking (De Jesus, 1992). Artists tend to lose their trust in galleries and rather submit to other jobs to financially sustain them (Blackall & Meek, 1992). In contrast to Western countries, the gallery answers to all financial worries of the artist in preparation for an exhibit and their only task is to create (Caplin, 1998). Thus, their creative process is enhanced and developed as they are motivated to create with satisfaction (Mace & Ward, 2003).

8 COMMERCIALIZATION THROUGH MASS PRODUCTION

According to Duldulao (1998), artistic integrity is "curiously remote from society" in which visible consumption of wealth and investment are at stake. Money is dominant in the art market and consumers are willing to spend regardless of the object's intrinsic value (Gans, 1999). "Since all art is commercial, the best art must be the most popular art, and the best measure for judging aesthetic quality must be money" (Warhol, 1977). Copying someone else's art is typical and transforms it to their own version (Schiff, 1984). Paintings range differently in the Philippines and one cannot get print copies for less than the price from other countries (Fairly, 2012). Mostly good major works are brought by foreigners who can sell them for five times their acquisition price abroad (Fairly, 2012).

Commercialized Philippine art were prevalent along *Mabini Street*,

and also referred to as *Mabini art* in the post-World War II era (Fernandez, 1980). According to Quingco II & Hartung (2013), it originated from a group of conservative artists who opposed modernism during the fifties and the art was reduced to gross commercialism. Artists and their younger apprentices sold their artworks for the local tourist market and eventually useful for export (Duldulao, 1997). Castro (2023) stated that their production consisted of stereotyped images such as nipa huts, the daily life of farming, and landscapes which were copied from foreign magazines and photographs (Figures 6 and 7). *Mabini* artists used brown Madonna



Fig. 6. Serafin Serna. *Harvest Time*, n.d. Oil on canvas.



Fig. 7. Gabriel Custodio. *Rural Road*, 1953. Oil on canvas.

and child as their subjects, flowers in vases, variety of fruits that became distinctive and done in the most effortful manner than talent (Quingco II & Hartung, 2013). *Mabini* artists are vendors who sell and offer their artworks in the street who are expecting for a good bargain (Castro, 2023). The people who buy *Mabini* art were from the middle-income groups who preferred realistic landscape paintings that were tasteful and aesthetically pleasing (Fernandez, 1980). Moreover, low-income groups bought these paintings only to accentuate their homes (Fernandez, 1980).

The popular taste in Philippine art was created by Fernando Amorsolo, one of the most prolific Filipino artists of his time (Duldulao, 1998). Amorsolo's work were highly commercialized and were featured in calendars, brochures and local magazines that conveyed an idealized rural Filipino life (Figure 8). It remained



Fig. 8. Fernando Amorsolo. *Planting Rice*, 1921. Oil on canvas.

predominantly agricultural and its industry dominated by foreign capital (Miroy, 2011). In contrast, expressive high-quality paintings were refined and depicted daily life accurately reflecting the economic struggles, which later became distributed on a limited scale (Figure 9). According Fiske (1989), high artistic quality or social relevance avoid stereotyping and popular art becomes less elevated.



Fig. 9. Jorge Pineda. *Las Buyeras*, 1903. Oil on canvas.

9 ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Art is meant to be displayed for eternity, but it is also meant for the line of business (Dean, 1998). *Art for Art's Sake* defines the quality of an artist's imagination and skills, where the creation of art aims for cultural success over commercialism (Frith & Horne, 1988). Art organizations are in critical positions to help shape aesthetic taste, educate the public, and secure financial stability (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). They also have the responsibility to address the problems of commercialism and retain the aesthetic value (Chong, 2001). Factors that affect cultural progress include economic decline, inflation, and monetary value (Duldulao, 1997). Money is the most essential tool to enter the business and without capital, there is no assurance for success (Caplin, 1998). Art must also be affordable in order to shape its cultural needs (Mandel, 2009).

The general public are not trained to look at art and lack the knowledge about its posterity (Geetz, 1987). Products are purchased without recognizing the name of the artist (Mandel, 2009). For instance, the use of abstract art is a common practice and treated as generic paintings (Jin, 2016). The artist's experience is important for galleries and it begins from marketing, especially when their credentials are highly regarded (Blackall & Meek, 1992). In the current milieu, art is created for commercial purposes rather than for its own sake (Chong, 2001). Evading art commercialism and proper education can change the cultural mindset (Reyes, 1995).

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

Art audiences are likely to emerge from particular age groups, social classes and educational backgrounds, which may cause alienation and skepticism toward the arts (Chong, 2001). Art organizations should find new ways of breaking down barriers that hinder art accessibility (Byrnes, 2003). Societies create a strong art infrastructure and place importance on audience development (Ritzer, 2002). Social class is also evident in arts participation through wealth disparities (Byrnes, 2003). For instance, the gap between the classes becomes apparent in operas, ballets and art galleries as it is commonly associated with the upper classes (Chong, 2001). Traditional elitism threatens to devalue the arts and diminish public relevance (Foreman-Wernet, 2017). The audience invests money and time in support of the art organizations, while art organizations are committed to give audience pleasure (Schlosser, 1997). They make choices about the events they wish to participate in and are willing to offer something in return for that participation (Lull, 2000). Marketing is an effort to motivate people to attend performances and exhibitions or purchase artworks or crafts (Blackall & Meek 1992).

Audience development is to improve art accessibility for a wide range of people, and not just to those who are already committed attenders (Chong, 2001). Art organizations need to understand people's relationships with the arts and identify the range of influences on their decision to participate (Allison & Kaye, 2003). There should be a guide for art organizations, because they are the principal sources of income for artists who depend on livelihood (Caplin, 1998). Allocation of income must be divided appropriately, which has been a point of contention for both parties (Coggin & Fabozzi, 2003). Art organizations should stay committed to cost effectiveness and public accountability (Chong, 2001). Thus, it will result to its own success (Smith, 1996).

11 CONCLUSION

As an art institution, Hiraya Gallery is known to have an artistic mission that help solve problems or meet a particular need in a society. Artists in Hiraya Gallery are at their best when not commercialized. The present state of the contemporary visual arts in the Philippines is weak and commercialism is a roadblock for artistic integrity. Hiraya Gallery remains significant as they encourage and motivate Filipino artists to cultivate their talent and retain its aesthetic relevance. Artists and its audience are vital for cultural advancement and Hiraya Gallery promotes the Filipino identity globally.

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