

ADELAIDE INSTALLATIONS

incorporating the 1994 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art

Adelaide Festival 1994

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volume 1



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Beyond the Material World

**INSTALLATIONS BY EIGHT ARTISTS FROM NORTH
AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA
ALISON CARROLL**

The cultural focus of the 1994 Adelaide Festival is radical, slicing the global orange into one or maybe two longitudinal segments, between 100 and 150 degrees East.

The visual arts component focuses on installations made by only a few of the leading artists of this geographical slice. As it would be impossible to select a 'representative' group of artists from the Asian countries within this span, it was essential to work with a theme that in some way brought threads of ideas together. In turn, it was desirable that the thread, when made into a linking stitch between the artists, would enlighten some of the broader issues of the art of our time and place. Such a stitch, entitled here, *Beyond the Material World*, is of course only one thread of thousands that make up the complex and varied cultural material around us.

It is possible for audiences in Adelaide, encountering the various installations around the city, interspersed with those by Australian artists, to respond in many ways to the individual works. It is the role of this catalogue, therefore, to articulate some of the issues which link the eight artists from China, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia exhibiting here.

BUDDHISM

Some Buddhist terms:

bodhisattva - buddha to be

buddha - an awakened or enlightened one

dharma - truth

nirvana - absolute truth

The ten great virtues all bodhisattvas must perfect are charity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truth, determination, universal love, equanimity.

A common lament of Asian artists is that they are categorised as particular, peculiar, different *per se* by non-Asians, easily summarised and easily dismissed.

Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism*, has made the world a little more sensitive to neat pejoratives about people of the 'East', and frequently the neat epithets

nowadays are as much complimentary and positive as the previous ones were not. However, such naming exists because it is convenient, and in some cases can be revealing; after all 'Asia' is a politically convenient naming invented by the West of an extremely diverse region of the world.

(Ironically, in some ways Australia avoids this process of naming because of our seemingly more complex, less 'established' cultural milieu, and in the process can be either totally misnamed (eg. displaced, second-rate Europeans) or forgotten.)

So, to the metaphysical areas beyond the physical and material which are manifest in both specific individual instances and the widest cultural community in various Asian countries. As can be seen in the works this issue is complex, unending, and ultimately it is futile to wish to contain or circumscribe it. As the Indonesian artist, Heri Dono, asks, what is the definition of rational or irrational - what is the context, who decides? Science can be seen as subjective, based on what sort of questions are asked, and by whom, and in what circumstances. Rules and certainties are constantly changing.¹

This area of discussion - the metaphysical and non-material - is easily open to misinterpretation. It can readily be seen to be part of the 'orientalist' tag clarified by Said: that Easterners were described by Westerners as emotional, sensual, unintellectual, indeed irrational, making them different and inferior. Some eminent Asian scholars, like Indian writer Geeta Kapoor, articulate their discomfort with this area, seeing both the easy naming of the old epithets, and the practical destruction coming from newly confident sectarian interests currently in countries like India.

CONFUCIANISM AND AESTHETICS

Confucianism positively emphasises aesthetics in life, as long as they are serving objectives, like the enhancement of tao (heaven or the mandate of heaven). It is a virtue to serve the community so tao may prevail in the world. Art and music are expected to purify the emotions and create harmony.

So, why do it? Because there are codes of belief and cultural activity in various Asian societies which leading members of those societies adhere to, believe in and participate in, which are central enough, important enough, and telling enough, to explore.

And the centrality, importance and information gained is the difference between exploring such an issue in Australia, say, and Asia.

Such codes exist in Western societies of course, in both traditional religions and in cults and sects or other belief systems. A recent poll published in the Melbourne *Age*² found that three out of four Australians believe in God, one in two hope for a life after death, and a third trust in the power of the stars to guide their lives. But besides understanding how Christianity, through its various interpretations of the Catholic and Protestant Church has influenced certain codes of behaviour in a country like Australia (where Christianity has been dominant), such particular metaphysical beliefs do not infringe on or control the lives of the majority of people; and they do not overtly form the basis of the ideas of the majority of our major creative or intellectual figures. The same could not be said in Asia.

Studies on spirituality in art of the West post-industrial revolution often quote Wassily Kandinsky's treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* published in 1947. He talks of an inner mood logically extending through the use of external forms and gives the example of Western sympathy with the work of 'primitives'. The issue here is, that in comparison with the cultures of Asia this is a relatively isolated treatise, with the issues not wholly obvious in the artist's work nor extending out into a wider accepting community.

In *Religion and Modernisation* in Southeast Asia, Fred R von der Mehden, while rejecting the notion of 'other-worldliness' as used derogatively to describe Asian cultures and their seemingly 'psychological isolation from this universe', notes there is

*'no doubt that in theory there is a de-emphasis upon material goods, and that, when compared to their European and American counterparts, the average Buddhist, Muslim or Christian in the region does appear to have a deeper commitment to matters of faith . . . More concrete is the description of the South East Asian as more dependent upon spiritual forces for defining his present place and future . . .'*³

A specific recent example of self-description is given by Ali Alatas, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, at a speech given in mid-1993 to the *World Conference of Human Rights* in Vienna. He began by distinguishing his own country from others present:

We are also here as a country from Asia, that vast continent which, over the millennia, has given to the world its major religions, the wisdom of its

*philosophical thoughts and the rich diversity of its age-old cultures and civilisations.*⁴

It is hard to think of a non-'Asian' Foreign Minister speaking like this at such a gathering . . .

SHINTO

Shinto literally means the 'way of kami', meaning 'mystical', 'divine' or 'superior'. Symbols of kami are found in natural beauty and the forces of nature.

Shinto'ma' - interval

Buddhism 'ku' - emptiness

'Time, space and the world of differentiated things are not discrete, frozen entities, but constitute an immediately-experienced continuum rich with the fullness of Being . . . The aesthetic character of this is expressed in a heightened sensitivity to the beauty of things and to artistic creativity . . . Such a sensitivity and art therefore carry religious meaning, and such religious expressions often have aesthetic meaning.'

Richard B Pilgrim, 'Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Tradition in Japan', *Art, Creativity and the Sacred*, Cappaadonia, NY, 1984, p.139.

It is this issue that the Asian component of *Adelaide Installations* seeks to tease out, bearing in mind that 'matters of faith' can include much wider areas than the main religions and stretch into the widest notions of 'culture'. Stories of the metaphysical abound in South East Asia; Japan is famous for its ghost stories; Koreans speak of everything around them having a spiritual base; and the Buddhist emphasis on the space between is as telling as paying attention to specific spiritual presences. To take a step into a directly cultural example, note the disdain of the seventeenth century Chinese intelligentsia for Western mathematical perspective in painting which sought to articulate and place physical objects clearly in definable positions: how obvious, how banal, they thought. 'True painting' left spaces and merely gave indications of any physicality, encouraging the viewer to speculate on higher, abstract, and more important conceptual issues.

However, there is a significant group in Australia who would relate to the cultural mode suggested for Asia: the Aboriginal people. Here, important codes of the 'non-

material' underlie the thoughts and activities of the majority of the population and is evident in the way many Aboriginal artists and others think about and explore their world.

This can be over-simplified. In Asia and Aboriginal Australia, significant groups and figures overtly reject this cultural code, although it could be argued that they are relatively few, and in any case they would know of the codes that they are eschewing. For example, some Japanese artists reject the codes of Shinto, Zen and the metaphysical generally to glorify in post-modern ideas and impersonal materials.⁵

Of course, other broad areas of difference currently exist between Asian and Australian art practice. For example, less women in Asia are able to make art, such is the expectation on them to look after a family. Artists in Asia are less able to support a critical practice than in Australia, as the cultural pressure is on less outspoken behaviour. Artists in Asia are more likely to be at ease as a group as well as individually, looking after the interests of both, compared with the situation in Australia. Critics in Asia are less likely to choose individual artists for particular negative attention and so on. It is worth noting that some of these issues are similarly pertinent in Aboriginal Australia.

ISLAM

Five Pillars of Islam

No God but Allah, and Muhammed is his Prophet

Performance of daily prayers

Payment of 2.5% of one's possessions annually

Observance of Ramadan (the month of fasting)

Making a pilgrimage to Mecca (Hadj)

The idea for the focus on the metaphysical came as a result of listening to a conversation between two Filipinas - educated, erudite, urban, urbane - talking about 'energy centres' in the Philippines. (Energy centres are special places which occur in the Philippines, where people gain personal energy and special powers, leading to healing insights and other special psychic achievements.) I did not think I would hear such a conversation in similar circumstances in Australia. Why? Could the reason for the difference be explored in a country such as Australia without 'orientalist' assumptions being made? I was reassured by the positive response from artists, writers and people asked to write their 'stories' printed here. There has even

been surprise that it may be an issue. Equally important is the argument that now, in the 1990s, in the 'age of the Asia Pacific rim' - when Asian economies are so dominant in the world and Asian politics are becoming so powerful, and the whole world lives by Asian technology - is the time to put aside nervousness about orientalism and investigate some of the plains and crevasses of these cultures.

TABLE OF RELIGIONS BY PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION

	Buddhist	Christian	Muslim	Other
Indonesia	-	9%	90%	1%
Malaysia 25%	-	53%	22%	
Philippines	-	93%	5%	1%
Thailand 92%	1%	4%	3%	

(Fred R von der Mehden, *Religion and Modernisation in Southeast Asia*, Syracuse UP, 1986, p.35)

One of the easy, mistaken ideas about 'Asia' is that its culture is old and unchanging. Asian people are constantly aware of the issue, and are at pains to articulate two sides. A recent advertisement for Garuda Airlines puts dancing girls and wayang heads together with electronic communication devices and says that in looking to the future they have not forgotten the past. In their turn, people in Asia can sometimes misinterpret Australia as only new, and therefore uninterestingly one-dimensional. In this context, it is salutary to think that Hong Kong, Singapore and Bangkok were established after Sydney; that strong immigrant bases, like Malaysia or Taiwan, have many comparisons (and contrasts) with our patterns of migration in Australia; that cultures like Indonesia or the Philippines tolerate as much religious diversity as we do in Australia; that, indeed, nothing remains the same, and that one of Australia's great assets - our dynamic, changing diversity - is also an asset, and seen as such, in Asia.

Cultures with strong

Even religion, which to many epitomises the unchanging, is constantly being reformed and reinterpreted. Religions develop differently as they move into new geographic locations. The Buddhism of China and Japan is different from that of

Thailand and India; the Islam of the Philippines is different from that of Malaysia and Indonesia, and Australia; and the Christianity of the Philippines is different from that of Australia or Korea.

New religions build on the old. Most cultures in Asia as elsewhere have an animist base. The cult of the ancestor remains variously strong often overlapping with later spiritual thought. The reverence accorded the Virgin Mary follows the worship of the old Earth Mother deity. The major traditional religions or modes of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity came to this region in various periods: Buddhism from India to Sri Lanka to Indonesia, Thailand, Indo-china, China, Korea and Japan, from the fifth century AD; Islam from the Middle East to Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines from the thirteenth century, and by different migrant forces to Australia. Christianity came from Spain often via the Americas to the Philippines and other smaller centres some four hundred years ago, with constant reinforcement from its missionaries throughout the region for the next few hundred. A separate migrant force brought Christianity to Australia in this period.

It is a complex area. Most Australians know some of the issues around Christianity: the story of Christ's life, including stories of the miracles, and his rising from the dead; and most know the Ten Commandments, stories of later saints, and of various differences between the institutions of the Church, and the various rituals laid down by them. But most have little idea of the minutiae of history, and reflections and laws and beliefs. . . Now, apply such a knowledge to the other belief systems of our world, particularly in this time zone, to try to get a view of the seemingly impossible task of understanding the various issues within them all. Even in Christianity in the region, compare the effect of the Protestant Dutch church in Indonesia and the Catholic Spanish church in the Philippines. Even in the work of the Festival artists, think of Heri Dono's reference to the wayang, originally an ancestor worship device, reinterpreted through stories of the Hindu Ramayana, now created in a predominantly Islamic society but with references understandable in Australia.

The discussion of mythology in the section 'Insular South East Asia' of Yves Bonnefoy's *Asian Mythologies* begins thus:

'The vast Malay archipelago constitutes an incomparable field for the mythologist. Close to Melanesia and Polynesia, it is still rich in a great number of oral traditions; close to the Asiatic world, where writing has

*played an essential role, it is equally rich in numerous religious and epic literatures in which the influence of Indian mythology and Islam have left traces. It is a crossroads area in which the oral and written coexist and in which prehistoric migrations left various substrata, which came to be modified to a greater or lesser degree in the historical period by the great civilisations of India, China, Islam and Europe.'*⁶

CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

Christian mysticism here refers to the human soul's direct experience of oneness with ultimate Reality, or God, in the context of the Christian faith. The essence of mysticism is the sense of contact with the Divine or Transcendent, involving in its higher forms the experience of union with divine Reality. Whatever may be one's judgement of its value, there can be no doubt that mysticism has played an important role in the history of the Christian religion. In the religion of Paul and John 'Christ-mysticism' is fundamental; in the life of the Eastern Church mystical aims and methods have been pursued from an early period; in the West, mysticism was of vital importance during the Middle Ages; it was a significant factor in the 16th and 17th centuries; and it has once again become a noticeably living influence in recent times...

'Mysticism extends far outside the sphere of Christianity. It is a dominant tendency in such other forms of religion as the higher religion of India, Mahayana Buddhism, Islamic Sufism, in the Jewish Kabbala and Hasidism. Among mystics everywhere there is a common element in the consciousness of the Transcendent and in the more developed phases of mystical experience of union with the divine.'

The Rev. Sidney Spencer, *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol 16, 1985, p.372.

A number of 'voices' have been asked to speak on this theme through this catalogue: the artists, a critic or writer giving background to the artist's work, and also a number of people telling personal stories relevant to the theme. The variety of tone and inclination in these following short pieces, as much as the information included, tells us about the variety of these cultures and their responses to them. We are also reminded that English is not the first language of many of the writers, and the 'art'

language accepted in Australia certainly is not a universally practised mode.

The stories are another layer. The writers, a Thai sculptor and professor at Silpakorn University in Bangkok, a Filipino artist, curator, writer and administrator (and first Director of the Australia Centre in Manila), and an Australian diplomat currently living in Singapore describe personal experiences of the non-material world in Asia.

That there are only eight artists from North and South East Asia in this part of *Adelaide Installations* means that this is not a survey, and it is not, obviously, a 'representation' of religions or codes. However, it may be taken as an indication of how some of the leading, most interesting artists of the region, who work in installation, are dealing with these issues.

There is a difference here from the recent *Magicians of the Earth* exhibition in Paris. The artists selected for Adelaide are not marginal or uninformed. They know the international art world personally, as their personal histories show. Also Australia is not a centre looking at the edge: we share the cultural history of the region, different in many ways, and similar in others.

There are four artists from South East Asia and four from the North. Heri Dono is part of Javanese culture and makes reference to its specific traditions coming from animist, Hindu and modern times. Santiago Bose and Roberto Villanueva both live in the mountains of Luzon in the Philippines, and in different ways work with local ideas and general notions of pre-hispanic and contemporary Filipino - and international - life. Montien Boonma is the most overt in relating to his Buddhist faith and way of life. Lü Shengzhong from Beijing in a way is unexpectedly revolutionary in rejecting the classical Chinese tradition and exploring pre-historic figures and beliefs. Soun-gui Kim, Shim Moon Seup and Toshikatsu Endo respond to essences: to absences and spaces as well as centering cores of being.

Footnotes

1. One pragmatic example is changing moral codes (areas which we often think are the least mutable), where two of the most overtly controlled, 'clear' political systems in this part of the world, Japan and Australia, seemingly have the most politicians and business leaders ostensibly breaking these rules, as witnessed by the series of corruption arrests in both countries in recent years.
2. 20 December 1993
3. Fred R von der Mehden, *Religion and Modernisation in Southeast Asia*, Syracuse University Press, 1986 p.104
4. *The Australian*, 16 June 1993
5. It could be noted also that this relatively small group of artists underscores the argument for post-modern theory being largely discarded by artists in Asia: it is not that they are 'behind', it is just that they are not interested.
6. Denis Lombard and Christian Pelras, *The Religions and Myths of Insular Southeast Asia*, *Asian Mythologies*, ed Yves Bonnefoy, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p.157.

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STORIES OF THE METAPHYSICAL

I have asked people to write these personal stories of their experience of the metaphysical to add another layer of explanation to this complex area. The writers are a Thai sculptor and professor at Silpakorn University in Bangkok, an Australian diplomat currently living in Singapore, and a Filipina artist, writer, curator, administrator, and first Director of the Australia Centre in Manila.

Alison Carroll

IN MELBOURNE

In September 1993, I had an opportunity to accompany Noelene Lucas, the Australian sculptor, who is a friend of mine, to Melbourne for the Fifth Australian Sculpture Triennial.

On the opening night of the *Lux in Situ* exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, I was there with some friends and after a while I went for a walk outside. The night was cold and dark. There were some dim lights, just enough for me to see the shadow of big trees around the park. I stretched out my hand to touch those big trees and sent my love and kindness to the guardian spirits who look after that area. I was a bit frightened when I heard a bird shriek and fly towards the Shrine of Remembrance. I looked towards the sound and I saw a reflection of light touching the white marble sculptures. It was very beautiful and it made me want to go there. I walked up the steps and my feet stumbled on something that felt like a stone plate. I looked around, there were many of them laying neatly side by side. I looked at them carefully again and my heart nearly stopped. I saw soldiers' names engraved on these marble plates so I then realised that I was standing at the monument to the brave soldiers.

I stood there for a while and sent my love and kindness and prayed for them. I walked around the Shrine admiring the sculptures around the monument. I then realised that I was all by myself in that area. I walked down the steps slowly and when my feet touched the ground I felt like there was a spiritual power wanting me to look back. I turned my face back and what I saw caused my hair to stand on end. I was sweating all over my body. I saw six soldiers wearing long overcoats standing on the stairs with a very calm and peaceful look. When I got myself together I quickly walked back towards the gallery as fast as I could but I felt like I was a child who had just learned how to walk, I was so slow. All of a sudden I heard the same bird that I

had seen before shrieking above my head once again in the middle of the silence. It was leading me back to the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

This was the most memorable experience that I can recall of my stay in Melbourne.

Vichai Sithirath

Associate Professor of Sculpture in the Faculty of Arts at Silpakorn University, Bangkok

MYSTICAL PATHWAY TO ACCEPTANCE

We knew from the start that our relationship would not be straightforward. She was a Malay Muslim academic from a rural-based family whose deeply held values and beliefs were rooted in matriarchal (Minangkabau) custom and tradition. A relationship with a non-Muslim Australian such as me had to be discouraged.

Both of us believed in the importance of maintaining close family links. But I already had experienced a distressing collapse in a previous relationship and did not want to enter further into another if the price was a break between her and her family.

A price we were prepared and willing to pay, however, was facing the prejudices, pre-conceptions, pre-judgements and misunderstandings about our relationship from many in both Malaysia and Australia who were outside our immediate families. Both of us believed passionately in striving to bridge barriers between races and between religions, not only amongst others but between ourselves.

Challenges to custom, tradition and religious values provoke emotion in any society. The chances of an agreement based on shared logic being achieved under such circumstances are slim. We knew we had to be patient, understanding and flexible.

But there were things to happen beyond our control which were to point more clearly to our future pathway. As in many countries of Australia's region, there is considerable weight given by Malays to mysticism. My experience in the region had taught me not to dismiss lightly such acceptance.

The strength of our belief in each other both as individuals and as a couple was heightened by several such occurrences. A most remarkable occurrence to me for which I could not find a logical explanation was her telling me about a dream she had had in which she discussed our relationship with a white woman she did not

know. She had the conversation over afternoon tea sitting with the woman at a table in a garden with a sandstone and brick house behind and a huge tree with purple flowers overhanging. The description of the woman and the garden setting left me in no doubt that the conversation had been with my mother who had died ten years before. She had no previous knowledge of the Australian setting or my mother.

But the most remarkable mystical occurrence was to come. At the invitation of her parents, we were taken unannounced to the home of the family matriarch for a family conference. All major decisions involving the family traditionally are made on such occasions. We were prepared to be told that our relationship could not continue without a break away from the family.

I was sitting with the men around a table at one end of the matriarch's house being questioned in Malay over a couple of hours, about religious concepts. I could see her at the other end of the house very upset by conversation with the matriarch and the other women. It seemed she had been told the relationship had to end.

Still very upset, she eventually sat beside me at the table with the men. She could not speak for several minutes. Then she told me something inexplicable had happened. Her aunt, the family matriarch, had not known we were coming and was being driven out of the driveway of her house. A neighbour who was recognised locally as a seer but who knew nothing about us stopped her. He told her not to go out because her niece (he named her) and a white man were about to arrive. He said that no matter what the family did, the two of us would end up together.

From having been absolutely opposed to the relationship, the matriarch gave us her blessing followed by the rest of the family. That was about ten years and three children ago. The impact of that mystical moment remains a binding strength in our relationship.

Brett Martin

Adelaide-born senior Australian diplomat now based in Singapore.

TWO STORIES

I always knew I was a little off-tangent. I used to rationalise this as part of my being a creative mind - an artist sensitive to everything around, including psychic energies of the metaphysical world. At 16 I could feel vibrations and emotional states of people. Palm and tarot reading and dream interpretations were normal processes and skills - or so I thought. At 22 I was counselling terminally ill cancer patients, preparing them for death, making them aware of the spiritual energies around them. Soon, I was deep into the study of the ways of the mystics, traversed the initiate's path of the occult (the term meaning 'hidden wisdom'), astrology, crystals and healing . . . all the ancient truths that we now term as the esoteric sciences, packaged by our times as the New Age. Parallel to this intellectual pursuit was a deep inquisitive search about the spiritual aspect of life that went beyond racial creeds, geographical boundaries, doctrinal religions and traditional ritual practices.

The theoretical knowledge was further strengthened by the actual practice of astral travel or out-of-body experiences (where I have detailed information of places, people, venues, sights and sounds of those I have travelled to and verified), hypnosis and precognitive dreams with events taking place in the physical world. Today, I know the patterns of my life before me and can tell those of my family and friends. Many of these practices stemmed from disciplined learning of how to control one's personal energies and harness spiritual energies found in nature only for the good. And through this all, seek oneness and peace with the Source of All.

These are two personal stories:

1. Going home one day from a day trip to a province outside the metropolis, my friends, with me at the wheel, came across an accident on the road, Two wounded, bloody bodies lay sprawled on the hot dirt ground. One body was that of a woman (who I later found out was already dead) and the other, of a man who was still breathing. This man was the object of attention of the native village folks. Driving past the scene of the accident, I found myself stopping the car and telling my friends that my conscience would not take it if I just drove on without checking to see if anything could be done.

I found out that no-one had taken the initiative to do anything. Everyone was just milling around, curiously ogling and a little excited. I started to look for a taxi only to be told that there were no taxis in that remote province. In earnest, I stood at the

middle of the road, trying to stop public jeepneys on their way to Manila. No-one stopped. Only after some time did a private jeep stop. I asked the driver to help us by just carrying the man to the nearest hospital and I offered to take care of anything from thereon. My first impulse pushed me to get on my knees and carry the man onto the jeep. My friend, Belen, small and petite, was instantly by my side to help. From my kneeling vantage point, I looked up and exploded with angry curses at everyone - especially the bronzed and muscled men standing around and looking but not even bothering to help. My loud curses jolted them to their sense as half a dozen men quickly, and not too gently, lifted the hurt but still breathing man.

As we were moving him and amidst my loud angry orders not to be too tough since the victim may have broken bones, I just knew at one exact moment that the man's soul chose to leave the physical body. But we rushed him to hospital to find out he was dead on arrival. Depressed, we proceeded home.

Perhaps it was past midnight when I awoke . . . feeling a presence come towards me in the dark and envelop me in an embrace of so much warmth, tenderness and love. I could feel the gratitude and I knew that it was the soul of the man who died that afternoon. I broke down crying and sobbing in the dark, talking to thin air, addressing all thoughts to this soul in another dimension. I had had this great emotional problem for nearly a year whose solution I could not even see in the horizon. 'Please help me solve this' I begged. I cried myself to sleep. Two days later, my 'impossible' problem was solved.

2. As in the material world, the dichotomy of good and bad, positive and negative, exists in the realm of the spirit. They, as energies, make themselves manifest either through psychic vibrations or material events. I have encountered benevolent energies or spirits in many experiences, sometimes with them coming to my aid when I invoke or ask their help. But there is one memory I cherish. Once during deep, deep meditation, I could sense, almost 'see' a being of light kneeling with me in prayer. The peace was overwhelming. The Catholic-Christian tradition I was born with defined it in my mind as an angel. My hermetic-esoteric mind called it a spirit guide or a being of light.

Then there also comes to mind an experience with the negative forces. One sunny afternoon, I was walking down a small cobbled path around twenty metres long at Yale University where I was taking some studio art courses. Suddenly, I noticed that

the sky darkened, the leaves of the awning trees stopped rustling in the gentle breeze (which also disappeared). The birds had stopped chirping and even the happy dance of the sunlight's reflection on the cobbled stone walk disappeared. I looked up to see, at the other end of the path, a big black dog crossing my view. It stopped at the centre, turned its head and stared at me.

An instinctive protection prayer came to my lips as I stood rooted to the spot staring at this dog whose vibrations were to my gut - terribly evil, negative, bad. At this point, let me stop to say I never watch horror films or read such stories. My mind is always preoccupied with studying the positive forces. So, this couldn't just be all in my imagination.

It was a heightened moment as the dog and I stood in a vacuum where temporal time seemed negated or frozen. In the animal's eyes were reflected some form of decision making process as it surveyed me. Then, the dog turned and went on his way, disappearing from my sight. No sooner was it gone than all of nature returned to the normal sunny day I was previously enjoying. I ran across the cobbled path to see where the dog went. In such a short time, it had vanished from sight and was nowhere to be found.

Jeannie Javelosa

Artist, writer, critic, curator, administrator

Inaugural Director of the Australia Centre, Manila