

INDAY CADAPAN

Elsie Reyes-Cadapan (1939-2004), affectionately called “Inday” by her family, friends, and the arts community, was a prolific artist whose works spanned a number of media including painting, wood sculpture, glazed ceramics, drawing, collages, and even furniture. *Inday*, a Visayan term of endearment towards women, had been weighted with prejudiced connotations of being a “househelp” in light of regionalism and class bias. Signing her works with this ownership was the artist’s way of reclaiming the power of the woman amidst the widespread marginalization of the times.

Inday had not always been an artist. After the war, as a widow with six children, the brave mother raised her kids by sewing dresses. By the 1960s, she set up a humble vegetable store, *lugawan*, and *kakanin* stall in the public market. In the 1970s, with a developing art scene, Inday turned to antiques dealing at the Mabini Arts Center. It was here that she discovered the works of famed modernists of Western art history including de Kooning, Picasso, and Matisse whose aesthetic considerations would later prompt her own signature style as an artist. Largely self-taught, she mounted her own one-woman show, *Expressions Inday '86* at the City Gallery in Rizal Park in 1986. While many of her works this time reference formal qualities similar to Matisse’s female figures, and Picasso’s *Guernica*, at the end of Martial Law, Inday devoted several works to echo the essence of the revolution. One of her monumental works, the seven-foot-tall *People Power*, was exhibited near the main entrance of the GSIS for over a decade.

It was also during this time that Inday created a series of works that focused on furniture as subject. The *Batibot* series highlighted a conceptual bent in some of her major works, referencing the uniquely Filipino Batibot chair which is characterized by wooden rounded seats and bent iron rods forming a circular and semi-heart shaped backrest. The Batibot, which literally means “small but strong,” serves as the artist’s allegorical device for sturdiness, tenacity, and strength. Inday’s works would rework the furniture’s formal design with a creative and aspirational imagination: the chair’s backrest’s intertwining loops would resemble a mother’s breasts, kissing lovers, or a womb.

As an artist, Inday focused on women’s stories and experiences, their struggles and triumphs as individuals, mothers, homemakers, and laborers of all kinds. She brought to the forefront an urgent conversation about the struggles of women in Philippine society, whose lives are implicated by forces of authoritative panopticons. Through her colorful paintings, unaffected drawings, and expressive sculptures empathic with a choice of colors and simple linear manifestations, Inday cradled her subjects whose lives had seen enough upheaval, with her art.

Inday depicts a cubist cornucopia of female figures in her 1995 oil on canvas *Bagong Bayani*. The women surround an animalistic creature reminiscent of Picasso’s symbol for universal suffering. Flowers are offered by innocent children to the heroic laborers of the new age in this work about overseas Filipino workers. In The 1995 work *Plight*, we see a similar consideration for form, color, subject, and cubist figuration, but with a stark emotional bent. Human figures

form a massive entity of an oppressed community, their gestures seeking rest and respite from their laborious circumstances.

Inday was given a 6-month prognosis for liver cirrhosis, but she found healing through art and continued to exhibit for several years. She was still able to mount her second solo show at the Lopez Museum in 1994, her third at the Madrigal Center in Ayala Alabang in 1995, her fourth at the Art Space of Glorietta 4, and her final before passing away in 2004 at the Alliance Francaise de Manille. What is most striking about the artist is not only her creative accomplishments, but her compassion. Her art echoes the resonance of an inspired hope for a better world.

John Alexis Balaguer

References

Francisco, Ricky, and Rachelle Medina. *The Many Faces of Inday Cadapan*. Fundacion Sansó, 2022.