

Press release, March 5, 2025

## The Philippines Unveils 'Oculus' as its Inaugural Cultural Program as Guest of Honour at the Frankfurter Buchmesse 2025

**FRANKFURTER  
BUCHMESSE**  
15 – 19 OCTOBER 2025  
GUEST OF HONOUR PHILIPPINES



Image courtesy of the artists and NCCA, Joscha Steffens © VG Bildkunst, 2025

**Heidelberg, Germany — Heightening anticipation for its Guest of Honour role at the Frankfurter Buchmesse 2025, the Philippines presents *Oculus*, an exhibition that brings together moving image, research and installation to reflect on what it means to “see things.”**

Artists **Stephanie Misa** and **Joscha Steffens** work out how seeing, shaped by both ecology and imagination, can give rise to visions. *Oculus* immerses audiences in a space where scientific knowledge and aesthetic education intersect, and where the line between real and spectral blurs.

One of the entry points of the exhibition is Philippine National Hero Jose Rizal's ophthalmological studies in Heidelberg and his novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, parts of which he wrote when he was in the same city.

Curated by **Patrick Flores**, *Oculus* is a central feature in the Philippines' cultural program as Guest of Honour at the 2025 FBM. It resonates with the theme of the country's participation: *The imagination peoples the air (Fantasie beseelt die Luft)*, which was cited from the same novel by Rizal.

***Oculus* will open on March 15, 2025, 6:00 PM, at the Heidelberger Kunstverein and will run until May 18, 2025. There will be an Artist Talk on March 16, 2025, 2:00 PM, with Misa, Steffens, and Flores.**

Misa is a Vienna-based Filipino visual artist, researcher and curator whose work centers on decolonizing methodologies. She examines phenomena related to the orality and richness of multilingualism.

Amsterdam-based German artist Steffens creates work about hidden communities that immerse themselves in an imaginary world, particularly the game world, focusing on those forms of gaming that require their members to immerse themselves completely in the skin of their avatar and transcend the limits of play.

Flores is Chief Curator of National Gallery Singapore and concurrently the Professor of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines and Director of the Philippine Contemporary Art Network. He was Curator of the Philippine Pavilion in 2015 and the Taiwan exhibition in 2022 at the Venice Biennale. Flores serves as the curator of the Philippine Pavilion for the country's role as Guest of Honour at the 2025 FBM.

*\*More information about the artists and curator on our bio notes page*

## Reimagining Vision and Perception

Flores explains, “Seeing things can mean grasping objects visually to prove that they really exist in the world. But it can also be about sensing what lies beyond the visible. *Oculus* takes us through historical moments that both clarify and complicate our view, inviting us to explore new dimensions of thought and action.”

Steffens deepens this exploration during his research in the Philippines. In Mount Banahaw, he worked with the spiritual community *Samahan ng Tatlong Persona Solo Dios of Kinabuhayan*, who regard Rizal as a reference of the Filipino Christ and treat his writings, particularly *Noli Me Tangere*, as sacred. Published in Berlin in 1887, *Noli Me Tangere* played a critical role in inspiring the Philippine revolution against Spanish colonization.

Meanwhile, Misa delved into the archives of Heidelberg's Augenklinik to investigate Rizal's early medical work. Her installation reimagines the *augenspiegel* (ophthalmoscope)—invented in 1851 by the German physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz—as a multifaceted portal, encouraging viewers to explore the boundary between the literal retina and the metaphorical “mind's eye”.

Senator Loren Legarda, the visionary of the project states, “In Germany, the Philippines' Guest of Honour participation provides an insight into our literature and our culture, sharing with the world the intelligence of our people — one inspired by our heroes, our complex history, our multicultural reality, and the endless possibilities our talents can accomplish.”

## Facts & Figures

<b>Exhibition</b>	<b><i>Oculus</i></b>  Cultural Program of the Philippines Guest of Honour Frankfurter Buchmesse 2025
<b>Artists</b>	<b>Stephanie Misa &amp; Joscha Steffens</b>
<b>Curator</b>	<b>Patrick Flores</b>
<b>Place</b>	<b>Heidelberger Kunstverein Hauptstr. 97, D – 69117 Heidelberg</b>
<b>Duration</b>	<b>March 16 – May 18, 2025</b>
<b>Opening</b>	<b>March 15, 2025, 6:00 PM</b>
<b>Artist Talk</b>	<b>with Stephanie Misa, Joscha Steffens and Patrick Flores March 16, 2025, 2:00 PM</b>
<b>Presented by</b>	The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) National Book Development Board (NBDB) Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Office of Senator Loren Legarda Talking Heads e. V. HdKV Heidelberger Kunstverein Baden-Württemberg Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst
<b>Information</b>	<b>Exhibition <i>Oculus</i></b>  Heidelberger Kunstverein: <a href="https://www.hdkv.de/en/exhibitions/oculus">https://www.hdkv.de/en/exhibitions/oculus</a> E-Mail: <a href="mailto:Fabienne.Finkbeiner@hdkv.de">Fabienne.Finkbeiner@hdkv.de</a> Phone: ++49 (0) 6221-184086  <b>Philippines Guest of Honour Frankfurter Buchmesse 2025</b>  <a href="https://philippinesfrankfurt2025.com">https://philippinesfrankfurt2025.com</a> and on the social media pages @philippinesfrankfurt2025: <a href="#">Facebook</a> , <a href="#">Instagram</a> , <a href="#">Tiktok</a> , <a href="#">Linkedin</a> .

## The Artists



**STEPHANIE MISA** is a visual artist and researcher whose work centers on decolonizing methodologies. Her artistic practice connects multicultural collaboration, curating, and feminist criticism. In her work, Misa examines phenomena related to the orality and richness of multilingualism.

She has shown works at the VBKÖ in Vienna (2024), Vienna Secession (2023), Kunstraum Lakeside in Klagenfurt (2023), RMIT Gallery, Melbourne (2023), Depo Istanbul (2023), KODA/RU House Governor's Island, NYC (2022), The KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin (2021), the 9th Bucharest Biennale (2021) to name a few, and was awarded the Art Merita Prize for Artistic Research in 2021.

She graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and a master's from the Interactive Telecommunications Program at New York University. She is currently a doctoral researcher at the University of Arts in Helsinki and working on projects funded by the Kone Foundation and SKR (Finnish Cultural Foundation). She lives and works in Vienna and lectures at the Department of Artistic Strategies at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, where she leads a Philippine Research Program, the *Island Tides Initiative*, supported by the Office of Senator Loren Legarda and the Embassy of the Philippines in Austria.



**JOSCHA STEFFENS** creates work about – and within – hidden communities that immerse themselves in an imaginary world. He focuses primarily on the game world – both virtual and live action – and its concepts of creating the avatar-self. Working across photography, video installation, games and film, his focus is on formats that require participants to transcend the boundaries of play, touching on a devotional level of gaming culture, its rituals and meanings within religious movements.

Joscha graduated from Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst (HGB) in Leipzig and completed the post graduate program of Kunsthochschule für Medien (KHM) in Cologne. He was Artist-in-Residence at Rijksakademie van beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam and appointed AIR Fellow of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in the Research Group of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS/KNAW). Since 2020 he is functioning as organiser and moderator of the art & science gameshow format *Talking Heads* in Heidelberg.

He was awarded with Wüstenrot Foundation Award for Documentary Photography (2017), Großer Kunstpreis Köln (2016), Mannheimer Kunstpreis of Heinrich-Vetter-Foundation (2020), among others.

His works in public and private collections include: Fotografische Sammlung Folkwang Museum Essen, DZ Bank Art Collection, Art Collection of the European Central Bank, Huis Marseille - Museum voor Fotografie, Collectie Rijksakademie van beeldende Kunsten, Art Collection City of Heidelberg and the HSG Collection Sankt Gallen.

## The Curator



**PATRICK FLORES** is Chief Curator of National Gallery Singapore. He is concurrently Professor of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines and Director of the Philippine Contemporary Art Network.

He has written significantly on Southeast Asian art, specifically its colonial and modernist formations, and has curated contemporary exhibitions on and through Southeast Asia. He was a Visiting Fellow at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in 1999 and a Guest Scholar of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles in 2014.

Among his publications are *Painting History: Revisions in Philippine Colonial Art* (1999); *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* (2008); *Raymundo Albano: Texts* (2017); and *The Modern in Southeast Asian Art: A Reader* (2023), which he co-edited with T. K. Sabapathy.

Flores was a Curator (Position Papers) at the Gwangju Biennale in 2008, the Artistic Director of Singapore Biennale in 2019 and Curator of the Philippine Pavilion in 2015 and the Taiwan exhibition in 2022 at the Venice Biennale. Flores serves as the curator of the Philippine Pavilion for the country's role as Guest of Honour at the 2025 FBM.