

Betsy Westendorp:

The artist as Filipina

Betsy Westendorp may have been born a Spanish *señorita* with a Dutch lineage, but she has always been a Filipina at heart, at least since she first set foot in the country in 1951. Asked what made her fall in love with the Philippines, she answers, "It is not what, but who made me fall for the Philippines. I met my husband, Tony Brias (a Filipino-Spanish businessman), in Madrid, married him, and we made our home here in Manila. I loved him, his family, his friends, his country, and its people."

So in love was she with the country, that she gave birth to all her three daughters here.

Then newly married, young Betsy set about being an ordinary wife and mother. But a strong creative impulse and the sights and sounds of a land she had come to love

were too strong to resist.

Today, with hundreds of glorious paintings admired and treasured in private collections, various European galleries, our own Cultural Center of the Philippines, and even Malacañang Palace, Westendorp shows that a five-year hiatus only served to magnify the yearnings of admirers for her works, as proven by an extremely successful exhibit that recently opened at the Mandarin Oriental Suites

in Gateway Mall, Araneta Center.

With no less than President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Quezon City Mayor Sonny Belmonte, artist par excellence and fellow Presidential Medal of Merit awardee Juvenal Sarso, Araneta Center's Jorge and Stella Marquez de Araneta, and the artist herself cutting the ceremonial ribbon, the ex-

hibit opened to a crowd composed mainly of metro society's elite, including lovely muses who have posed for Westendorp's renowned portraits and who eventually became her dearest friends.

Also spotted admiring the artworks during the opening were Spanish Ambassador Luis Arias



Cutting the ribbon with Stella Araneta, President Arroyo and Quezon City Mayor Sonny Belmonte



Andrew Tan, Stella Marquez de Araneta, Katherine Tan, and Arturo Marquez

Romero and his wife, Soledad; former First Lady Imelda Marcos; Lorna Laurel; Isabela Governor Grace Padaca; Consul Fortune Ledesma; power couple Andrew and Katherine Tan; art connoisseur Danny Dolor; Peter Jentes; Nene Quimson; former beauty queens Peachy Sacasas-Alimurung and Erlynn Campos; Marybeth Lopez de Leon; Mario Barao; Georgina Padilla Zobel; Lilia Pineda; fashion czar Pitoy Moreno; former Foreign Affairs Secretary Roberto Romulo with wife, Olivia, and son Anton; Conchitina Sevilla-Bernardo with husband, former Philippine Ambassador to Spain Lani Bernardo; host Dr. Teyet Pascual; Ernest and Josie Padilla Rufino; and Binibining Pilipinas runners-up Regina Hahn and Richell Angalot with reigning beauties Marie Ann Umali, Melody Gersbach, and Paula Bianca Manalo.

Later in the day, guests relished hors d'oeuvres by Mandarin Oriental Suites, including baby potatoes with seafood *duxelles*, baked sausage rolls, smoked salmon and asparagus quiche, and curried chicken empanadas; cold canapés consisting of salmon tartare on celery with sour cream, assorted sushi, peppered beef with herbed horseradish dressing, seared tuna medallion with palm heart and papaya seed dressing, goat cheese toast with tapenade, Parma ham roulade with eggplant caviar; grissini sticks and vegetable crudites with smoked salmon dip; and assorted French pastries and chocolate-dipped fruits during the cocktails.

A great art experience for ordinary mallgoers and art aficionados alike, Westendorp's paintings have been lauded as "poetic expressionism" and "abstract dreams playing with light." Now 81 years old, she continues to paint a wide range of subjects, including landscapes, floral paintings, portraits and "atmospheric art," which illustrate her strong impressions of light and color. Some are paintings from years past while others are more recent, inspired by the Philippine Presidential Medal of Merit for Art and Culture recently awarded to her.

So well-loved and greatly missed was she by Filipino art lovers that even PLDT



With Spanish Ambassador Luis Arias and wife Soledad



Veana Fores and Nene Quimson



Ernest and Josie Padilla Rufino



With Judy Araneta Roxas

president Manny Pangilinan, himself a proud owner of a Westendorp painting that hangs in his Hong Kong home, took time off to enjoy the exhibit on Sunday.

How has her art changed since her first visit to the Philippines? "Come and tell me," she invites. Although the man who first made her fall for the Philippines is now gone, she is still besotted with the country, continuing to explore it with her heart and eyes, yielding beauty in the process.

Betsy Westendorp's exhibit "Reflections" is ongoing at the Mandarin Oriental Suites, Level 4 of Gateway Mall, Araneta Center, in Quezon City.



Betsy with PLDT's Manny Pangilinan and Silvana Diaz



Artist Betsy Westendorp at her exhibit "Reflections" with President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Stella Marquez de Araneta



Lovely muses in a row: Stella Marquez de Araneta, Conchitina Sevilla-Bernardo, and Marybeth Lopez de Leon



Former First Lady Imelda Marcos with Betsy Westendorp



Dr. Teyet Pascual and Danny Dolor



Juvenal Sarso, Engineer Ronagli, Arturo Marquez, and Peter Jentes