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# BEAUTY AND HERITAGE:

50th Anniversary of the first Miss  
Universe Pageant in Asia

# The Involvement of the Imeldific First Lady

## PURSUIT OF GLAMOR

*Then-First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos was committed to bringing the Miss Universe pageant here in our country.*

Contributor

**The Heritage Collective Staff**

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Following Margarita "Margie" Moran's win in Athens, Greece on May 25, 1973, then-First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos was committed to bringing the Miss Universe pageant here in our country.

On November 30, 1973, Manila's bid to become the host city was confirmed to international press by the Miss Universe, Inc. At that time, this international pageant had a 54 percent audience share in the United States alone.



## THE VENUE FOR THE SPECTACLE - THE FOLK ARTS THEATER BY NATIONAL ARTIST LEANDRO LOCSIN

After a successful bid for the pageant hosting, a problem soon emerged on the horizon around the first quarter of 1974, a proper venue that would be ready in 90 days and could accommodate at least 8,000 people. Naturally, she tapped into Leandro Locsin (later National Artist for Architecture) to build her vision.

In the place of an intended open-air amphitheater for 4,000 spectators at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Complex, Locsin moved back to the drawing board to imagine a "covered plaza" with a 1-hectare flat roof that was 15.5 meters high and supported by 8 sloping perimeter columns. Consequently, the column-to-column span reached up to 80 meters, and the entrances between each sloping perimeter resulted in a cross-ventilation system. Except for its distinct columns, all materials are prefabricated off-site. Thus, the theater's construction at the reclaimed land was made possible in a record time of 77 days, which was proudly proliferated in local newspapers, magazines, promotional materials, and a special segment during the actual pageant finals.

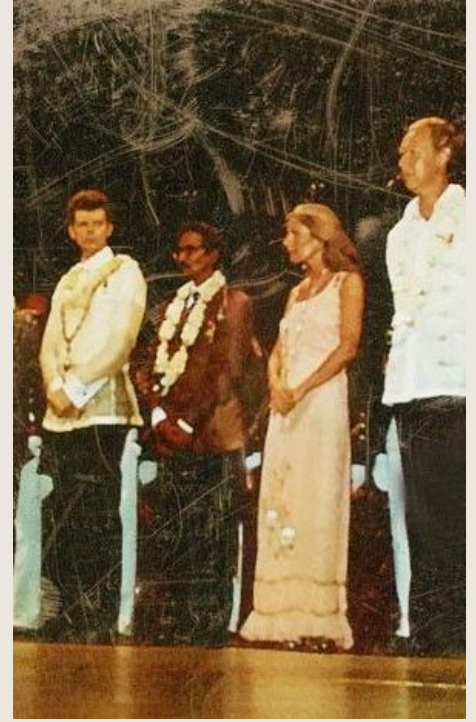
Unbeknownst to the admirers of this Brutalist masterpiece, the theater was the fruit of the labor of almost 2,000 men, who worked in shifts for 24 hours each day. While the construction expenditure was taken from the original budget for the new National Museum and Art Gallery building also by Locsin, supposed to be located within the CCP Complex, and was discontinued before pile-driving works had begun.

Around that time, the First Lady was obsessed with prioritizing the hosting of the Miss Universe pageant rather than solving the confined space of the huge collection of the National Museum of the Philippines in the few floors of the Old Legislative Building, as Beth Day Romulo, the diplomatic wife of Gen. Carlos P. Romulo, had realized. The rush and expense of this project was one of the manifestations of the notoriety that the ambitious First Lady had established, who was an avid patron of culture and the arts and the founding Chairman of the CCP. Upon its completion, the Folk Arts Theater became the largest single-spanned edifice in the Philippines.



# “KASAYSAYAN NG LAHI”

## A GRAND FILIPINO PARADE BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL SPECTACLE



*To mask the **on-going reclamation** within the CCP complex, the street decoration was crafted by the Neo-realist visual artist, Arturo Luz. Later on, these five luminaries would later be inducted in the Order of National Artists of the Philippines.*

In the presence of President Ferdinand Marcos Sr., First Lady Imelda Marcos, and some members of the diplomatic core, European nobility, and Miss Universe contestants, the Folk Arts Theater was formally inaugurated with a bang on July 7, 1974, through a propaganda street parade known as “Kasaysayan ng Lahi” or History of the Race. Around 20,000 school children, civil and military personnel, dancers, musicians, and actors converged for this 4-hour celebration of selected chapters of our history from the “Pre-colonial Barangay” to the “New Society.” The thousands of attendees were in awe by the sumptuous floats, costumes, and performances curated for the parade.

The much-needed spectacle and nostalgia of our history and culture was delivered by a parade committee, which the theater and film director, Lamberto Avellana, became in charge of production. Its musical direction was a collaboration between two doyennes of music of that time. Overall, the music head is Lucrecia Kasilag, also the musical director of the Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company or simply the Bayanihan Dance Company and Folk Arts Theater artistic director for Music. While, assistance on vocal music was tasked to Andrea Veneracion, the founder of the University of the Philippines Madrigal Singers or most commonly, the Philippine Madrigal Singers. In addition, choreography was assigned to Lucrecia Urtula, the founding director of the Bayanihan Dance Company and Folk Arts Theater artistic director for Dance.

# PROMOTING THE PAGEANT:

## IN MEDIA AND ITS OFFICIAL LOGO BY NATIONAL ARTIST ABDULMARI IMAO

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As usual, excellent public relations machinery was cranked up at full speed by the First Lady and local organizing committee through a promo video and documentary that featured the Philippines as “The Land of the Beautiful” to the international community.

Moreover, various commemorative souvenirs and print materials bear the official logo with the names, “Miss Universe Country 1974” and “Philippines,” surrounding the central graphic of the Sarimanok, a mythical bird-fish mythological figures of the Maranao people. This icon emblematic of this pageant edition was done by the eventual first National Artist of Moro descent and National Artist for Visual Arts, Abdulmari Asia Imao. In essence, it was one of his first forays into graphic design that resonated to Filipinos.



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# HOME FOR THE BEAUTIES

## THE PHILIPPINE VILLAGE HOTEL BY NATIONAL ARTIST JUAN NAKPIL

During the month-long stay in the country, the beauty contestants were at the newly-built Philippine Village Hotel. At that time, there were still a few hotel chains that could accommodate the huge influx of visitors for the international spectacle. Strategically located on a lot leased by the Nayong Pilipino Foundation and a stone's throw away from then-Manila International Airport, it was considered as the first airport hotel in the country. This hotel in Modernist style was created by the Dean of Philippine Architects and another National Artist for Architecture, Juan Nakpil.

In an article by the press staff for the pageant at that time, soft-opening kinks were observed such as the leaking in the ceiling and the scrambling of the management in sourcing the complete carpet that was laid out before the beauties arrived and the proper silverware for the bed and breakfast shoot of the new Miss Universe.

On a normal day, big crowds would gather at the hotel lobby and driveway as they tried to catch a glimpse of the beauties. At night, the candidates were able to relax and enjoy themselves together with other hotel guests and bachelors at the disco on the topmost floor of the hotel, the Par Avion, which also provided a nice view of the airport runway. In addition, the poolside of the hotel was the perfect setting not only for the candidates to cool off amidst our tropical climate but also for their swimsuit photoshoot and meet-and-greet with the press.



# The First Couple Going to Great Lengths

## PURSUIT OF GLAMOR

*Since Metropolitan Manila was forecasted to be at signal no. 2 due to Typhoon Iliang or Ivy, the First Lady instructed to conduct a cloud seeding operation*

Being the Imeldific that she was and as a former beauty queen herself, the First Lady went to great lengths to ensure the country's successful staging of the event. Since Metropolitan Manila was forecasted to be at signal no. 2 due to Typhoon Iliang or Ivy, the First Lady instructed the National Artificial Rain Stimulation Committee of the Philippine Air Force to conduct a cloud seeding operation from July 3 to July 20. Consequently, the cloudy skies clear out during the coronation day in the nation's capital, but at the expense of the devastation in Central Luzon brought by the diverted heavy thunderstorms.

Additionally, some of the pageant usherettes hand-picked by the First Lady and her aides, were also obliged to undergo a four-month training program in dance, etiquette, history, and music. Notably, one of the usherettes handing the bouquets to the winners and assisting the host during the Miss Universe 1974 pageant finals is Rosemarie "Chiqui" Brosas, who in a twist of fate would later win Binibining Pilipinas Universe 1975 and placed as fourth runner-up in the Miss Universe 1975 pageant in El Salvador.

***Typhoon Ivy left 20 dead, 46 missing, 42 fishermen lost in Polillo Island, and \$2 million dollars in damage to crop, structures, and livestock.***

While President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. signed Proclamation No. 128 on June 20, 1974. Under the ethos that the promotion of friendly relations with all nations as one of the hallmarks of our foreign policy and hopes that it is a golden opportunity to promote friendly relations through the holding of the Miss Universe Pageant in our country, the period from July 15 to July 21 was officially designated by the President as "Universal Friendship Week" In hindsight, this directive was borderline ambiguous by our chief executive and architect of our foreign policy.

On July 14, 1974, the last stretch of the pageant began when all 65 candidates had already arrived in the Philippines and were introduced in a glittering opening ceremony at the Folk Arts Theater, in the presence of Tourism Secretary Jose Aspiras and Miss Universe, Inc. President Harold Glasser. All of the contestants had the privilege of meeting the President and the First Lady at the Malacañang Palace on July 17. As a token of gratitude, it was reported that they received a commemorative medal and mother-of-pearl jewelry box from the first couple and the pageant organizers. Moreover, they also participated in the so-called "Barangay Day," where the candidates are selected to be an adopted daughter of a specific barangay or district of the Metro. When the pageant host Bob Barker asked one of the semi finalists during the final telecast, Miss India replied that she was the adopted daughter of Sampaloc, a district of Manila.

# THE PAGEANT FINAL

## SHOWCASING THE PHILIPPINES TO THE UNIVERSE

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On 10 AM of July 21, 1974, the pageant was broadcasted worldwide by CBS, in time for its primetime New York telecast. Undeniably, this Miss Universe edition became a two-hour Philippine extravaganza, which legitimized the fledgling Martial Law regime under the banner of boosting our tourism to the foreigners. In a pre-taped video, the outgoing titleholder and our very own Margie Moran welcomed the viewers while presenting the magnificence of the exterior façade of the Folk Arts Theater. Accompanied by the honor guards from the Philippine Military Academy, the 65 contestants opened the live show in their national costumes while singing “Let’s be Friends.”

Constantly keeping everyone entertained throughout the proceedings and graciously expressing the generosity and beauty of the Filipino people, the main host Bob Barker and correspondent Helen O’Connell fashioned two button-up Barong Tagalog and a yellow modern Terno, respectively.

Because of this genius design philosophy of the Folk Arts Theater, it provided all spectators with a panoramic view of the thrust stage and was flanked with simulated wood panels of “nakar,” a decorative mother-of-pearl inlay technique.

For the Miss Universe pageant, the silhouette of the stage floor and the traveler curtain above were patterned to the eight-rayed sun of the Philippine flag. The stage floor was outlined with light bulbs and embellished with “okir,” the vegetal and folk design motifs in curvilinear forms of Muslim Mindanaons. While enhancing the mood throughout each segment of the pageant finals, trees with ball lights made of windowpane oysters known colloquially as “Capiz,” were sprang out of the raised stepped platform and a constant sight to the audiences.

During the live swimsuit round, the 12 semifinalists in their red one-piece Catalina swimsuits had strutted towards the end of the sunray runway, which was accentuated by a series of two concentric side panels with dangling Capiz circles.

When the candidates are dressed to the nines gracefully descend the stepped platform towards the center stage, an assemblage of lighted Christmas “parol” lanterns in various shapes and sizes and a background fountain at the background, can be observed and have complemented the diversity of their stylish gowns.

At the endpoints of the stage, air-conditioned dressing rooms are placed that can accommodate 80 performers.

# THE BEST OF THE PHILIPPINES IN THE PERFORMING ARTS

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After the introduction of the 11 international judging panel which included General Carlos P. Romulo, later National Artist for Literature, Filipino talent was showcased such as the “Singkil,” a Maranao royal dance in which a prince and a princess weaved in and out of crisscrossed bamboo poles clapped in a systematized rhythm. It came into life by the internationally-acclaimed Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company. In 1956, Dr. Helena Benitez founded it as a group based in the Philippine Women’s University. By the 1960s, their performances made them become goodwill ambassadors locally and abroad, aside from their research on local art forms, which were later manifested in distinct repertoires. Moreover, the choreography of the said dance became synonymous with one of their founding directors and the National Artist for Dance, Lucretia Urtula.

Also, the folk song dedicated to the farmers’ arduous hard work in the field known as “Magtanim ay ‘di biro” and local rendition of the songs from the musical, “The Sound of Music,” were performed by the music novices of the “Pangkat Kawayan” or the Bamboo Band or Singing Bamboos of the Philippines. As introduced by Barker during the telecast, they are composed of children within the 6-16 years old, who can masterfully play woodwind, string, and percussion instruments made out of bamboo and under the baton of Victor Toledo.

Interestingly, the contestants in their bright modern Ternos had a special segment where they performed an Ilocano and English medley of “Pamulinawen,” a folk song of courtship and was one of the favorites of the first Marcos President from his hometown region of Ilocos.



# A SWIMSUIT SASHAY AT A SCENIC BACKDROP - THE NAYONG PILIPINO BY NATIONAL ARTIST ILDEFONSO SANTOS

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After the parade of nations and a commercial break, the pageant final telecast returns with a showcase of a pre-taped outdoor swimsuit spectacular. All the contestants paraded with the scenery of the “Nayong Pilipino” as its background. Aimed to represent the Philippines through architectural and cultural displays, an aviary, aquarium, fishing lagoon, and a diverse plant collection, this was the first cultural park of its kind in Asia, when it opened in 1970. These condensed replicas of natural and built landmarks throughout the country, spaces for culture and leisure, and lush flora were masterfully articulated in the large site by no less than the Father of Philippine Landscape Architecture and later National Artist for Architecture, Ildefonso “IP” Santos.

As colorful as the traditional Mindanaon dugout canoes with double outriggers and colorful vertical and triangular-patterned sails known as “vintas,” the contestants divided into four groups were able to parade in their neon one-piece swimsuits by Catalina Swimwear. Aside from the vintas, heavily featured in the montage was the side of the park representing Mindanao island group with its Samal houses that are raised atop the man-made lake and a mosque that is their place of worship of the majority Muslim inhabitants of this region of the country.



# The Coronation and Pageant's Legacy

## PAGEANT COSTS DRAINS COFFERS

*In the end, the Miss Universe 1974 pageant notably benefited the first family controlling state resources under Martial Law, large spendings were made for the event, which showcased Filipino culture and aimed to enhance the country's image while supporting the Marcos administration.*



On a surprising final note, our second Miss Universe, Margie Moran (also with Spanish ancestry), passed the crown to the 20-year-old Amparo Muñoz of Spain. Even the winner's sash was meticulously planned by the First Lady for this edition, as "Miss Universe" text was embroidered in blue fabric over a white satin base with a red border that reflects the three main colors of our Philippine flag

## Cultural Promotion at an Expense.

The government spending of 40 million pesos to host the pageant generated a substantial 117 million peso revenue.

During the later Marcos years, the Folk Arts Theater did promote folk presentations with its dedicated theater company, especially during the term of National Artist Lucrecia Kasilag as CCP President. Until the end of the first Millennium, it also featured international artists such as Frank Sinatra, James Ingram, and Janet Jacson. However by the 2000s and 2010s, this "monument of the Filipino Spirit" eventually became a shadow of its glorious past.

The Nayong Pilipino Park and the Philippine Village Hotel situated at the same area in Pasay also became white elephants as these properties did not generate the foot traffic and profit to justify its cost of construction and operations.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo signed Executive Order 111, the 8.6 hectares owned by Nayong Pilipino Park was converted to land for the future NAIA Terminal 3, which effectively ended the park's operations. After more than 2 decades of legal battles later, the Philippine government regained control of the abandoned Philippine Village Hotel last November 2023.

At the end of the day, the real winner of this cultural endeavor was President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. 's and tje First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos. Since Martial Law was declared in September 1972, the President was able to have absolute control of the entire national government, effectively suspending the both houses of Congress and the Supreme Court. Consequently, the check and balancing act on all of the state projects and public funds was absent and it encouraged the couple at the helm of Malacañang to continue the unregulated spending on grand spectacle of power, under the guise of culture and the arts.

In retrospect, it is through this international spectacle of beauty, the Miss Universe 1974 pageant, that combined grand civic architecture, local tourist sites, state events, performing arts, visual imagery, and public relations machinery, In turn, it conveyed to the community of nations the Filipino identity of courage, hospitality, and happiness. Therefore, the Marcoses was able to elicit a state-sponsored national culture for foreigners to have a strong impression of the Philippines, select Filipino artists to advance their careers, and the Marcoses themselves to seek legitimacy of the Martial Law regime and perpetuity of modernity and socio-civic order in the New Society across the islands.

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