

Full Text

BROCKA: THE FILMMAKER WITHOUT FEAR



National Artist for Film Lino Brocka began his journey as a filmmaker at a young age, escaping to his local movie theater to forget the difficulties of real life. As he gained prominence in the industry, he urged fellow filmmakers, artists, and citizens to confront the burning issues in Filipino society.

Brocka: The Filmmaker Without Fear is part of the Modern Hero Stories, a series of stories under Sandaang Salaysay about the lives of great and honorable Filipinos. Brought to you by Areté and Ateneo de Manila Basic Education in partnership with The Bookmark, Inc. and sponsored by Role Players, Inc. Written by Jose T. Gamboa and read by Ivy Baggao.

This is Lino Brocka. It had been two years since he became the first Filipino to convert to the Church of Latter Day Saints, which sent him to this leper colony in Hawaii as part of his training. Before that, he was a scholar at the University of the Philippines. Now, he's a missionary and a college dropout.

Whenever he could, he found a temporary escape in the cinema. He loved the movies ever since he was little and dreamed of someday becoming an actor.

When his father was still alive, he would take Lino to the cinema. Lino was an exemplary student in high school, excelling in debate and oration. In college he joined the Dramatic Club and auditioned for a role, but he was rejected because of his provincial accent.

After two years, Lino realized that the missionary life was not for him. With only \$50 in his pocket, he journeyed to San Francisco. Perhaps that was where his dream of becoming an actor would come true?

California, however, was a rude awakening to young Lino, who always imagined America as he saw it in the movies, where everything was glamorous and everyone was rich, beautiful, and well-fed. But after weeks of sleeping in the alleys with other homeless, who taught him how to survive on the streets, Lino realized that he had to wake up to reality.

Lino eventually found work as a busboy in a restaurant in later on, in a hospital for the elderly. After he had worked there for some time, his boss offered him a permanent position and a US citizenship... but he misses his mother, brother, and his friends back home.

What should he do?

“The Philippines is my home,” thought Lino, and so he bade America and his dreams of Hollywood farewell. He returned to his hometown of San Jose. His mother bought him 3000 chickens so he could start a business.

On weekends, Lino vacationed in Manila. Ben Cervantez, a fellow dramatic club member, introduced him to Cecil Guidote, the founder of the Philippine educational theater Association. She asked him to join PETA, but he declined. Lino knew his mother would be unhappy with him if he gave up the poultry business.

When Lino watched a rehearsal for PETA's first play, however, he saw that that was what he really wanted to do, not raise chickens in the province. He said goodbye to his mother and moved to Manila.

PETA staged plays and conducted drama workshops all around the country. Lino went everywhere and did everything! He ran errands, wrote scripts, acted, led exercises, and he eventually directed a few of PETA's TV shows. Nonetheless, he was happy because he was doing what he loved!

A movie producer Lino's work for PETA and hired him to direct a movie. Lino was excited to be able to direct his first film... But he was surprised that he had to write the screenplay too!

His first film, *Wanted: Perfect Mother*, a comedy based on the hit musical *the Sound of Music* was a box office hit and won an award for best screenplay at the Manila Film Festival!

Lino became very popular as a director after that, and many studios, up-and-coming actors and actresses wanted to work with him.

But Lino was interested in telling different stories, and for every few musicals and blockbusters he directed, he would also come out with one film that would be considered controversial or artsy, depicting issues like poverty, homosexuality, and prostitution, topics which no Filipino director had ever dared to tackle before.

“We want you to make the movies we tell you to... That are educational and show only the good things we are doing” said president Marcos.

“Stop being so dark and profound,” said his wife Imelda annoyedly.

The government didn't like Lino's “art” films, but they saw that he was a talented director and wanted him to create propaganda films for them. Lino knew that if he did as he was asked, his films would lie to the people.

He refused.

Because he refused, thugs began harassing his crew during production, his films were censored, even banned, and he had to smuggle his films out of the country. He began to realize that the problems of the country were connected to the problems of a filmmaker. Suddenly, his art started to gain a bigger meaning. He felt like he had a bigger purpose now!

But as a filmmaker, Brocka knew that no one could do such a big task as uplifting a country alone. So he joined activist groups and founded The Concerned Artists of the Philippines. But the government did not like civil disobedience. Once, during a rally to support the jeepney drivers, he was arrested and sent to prison for 16 days. And another time, returning from France, the government tried to prevent his return by denying the renewal of his passport.

While all of these events were happening, Brocka's films were being shown around the world. People were made aware for the first time about the plight of many Filipinos living in poverty, with some having to work as prostitutes, and others, scavenging among mountains of trash.

Lino, who was himself gay, show the lives of Filipinos who are living outside of society, so to speak. His films were lauded for their artistry and honesty at the prestigious awards such as the Cannes Film Festival in France.

“And the award for the best picture goes to *Bayan Ko* directed by Lino Brocka!” As Brocka stood on the stage and held up the trophy, the sound of applause ringing in his ears, he smiled broadly. He remembered the lepers he cared for, the people thrown into prison for speaking out against an oppressive government, and his gay and lesbian friends, all who are rejected by society.

“How interesting,” Brocka thought to himself, “if someone can bring about acceptance and change through films... What about the other art forms? I wonder what will happen to the Filipino film industry in the future?”

“The artist is first and foremost a citizen,” said Brocka once, “and thus he has to address the important issues confronting the country.”

Before Brocka, Filipino movies were simply copycats of western cinema. He showed that it was possible to make movies that were truly Filipino. He made movies that entertain, challenge, and made the audience think. Brocka's example showed directors, actors, and others in the entertainment industry how films could be used to call people's attention to the troubles of the country for the betterment of our society.

Source: Brocka: The Filmmaker Without Fear. Jose T. Gamboa. The Bookmark, Inc. 2013.

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