

'Smile to Life' in Paris, France.

TO try and define art ...said to be a mirror of the soul, it nonetheless arouses emotions, instills meaning and inspires admiration. Michel Jamet does not create new things, but has chosen to bear witness to past expertise which he is determined to preserve—passing on something we cannot afford to lose.—Ophelie Meunier

expressive of art, but defined by struggle of trying to belong, of trying to be "regularized," of trying to be accepted and respected, of wanting to be treated, as if one matters as a human being.

They are not unlike the older French women struggling to move a step at a time, as if toddlers balancing themselves, keeping from falling down, pushing a bag of groceries on wheels on hard-scrabble cobblestone sidewalks and devoid of help. It was a heart-breaking scene repeated not just in the streets, but in the subway platforms, and when I glanced at the eyes of these older folks, they mimic the tired eyes of the Filipina nannies whom I saw at 9pm, in between changes of work shifts, or on Saturdays and Sundays.

But even their difficult lives could not wipe away the joy in hearts, nor the Filipinas' desire to help another fellow *kababayan*.

While in search of the Philippine embassy, two Filipinas accompanied me, clearly out of their way, but they chose to walk three blocks, redirecting them from their church, just to ensure I was safe and got to the Philippine Embassy in 4, hameau de Boulaivilliers in the 16th district of Paris. They shared their lives of taking care of children, and homes, yet kept balanced by their weekend pleasurable get-togethers with friends and going home to the Philippines every two years.

At the meeting, I found an orderly and enthusiastic collaboration of 19 organizations, a few to name: Hiligaynon, Luzvimin, Filipino Helping Hands, Damayan, Ilocandia, Filipino Muslim Association, and Golden Hands Foundation discussing their agenda items, one of which is adopting a school in the Philippines.

What was impressive was the respectful decorum, facilitated by ConGen Maria Angela Ponce, and folks took turns, listening and sharing. Equally touching was the desire to behave as one family, ready to help other Filipinos in need, recognizing that they, as Filipinos, are here "*nakikibayan ika nga*," here to observe the laws of the country and to recognize that no one is above the law. And they all acclaimed the work being done and they all took time to notice the good work of Lito Gomez, who has de-

veloped a support group of Filipinos to assure the rule of law in the administration of Parisian style of justice and protection of human rights for everyone.

"In this part of Europe, Filipinos are conscious of being "*makatao*," a humane human being, for here, in France, away from their homeland, Philippines, "We are not here in a position of strength. We are here to help others, for who else will help us, except us, Filipinos who are in a position to share our good connections from networking. Part of that is also to give value to another Filipino, and by doing so, we bring back to the Filipino the culture of bayanihan, and politely by example, bring them to the consciousness of being a family" (Ambassador Rora Tolentino).

When the Ambassador articulated her philosophy, I was struck by the depth of her understanding of human nature, but also her innate wisdom in nurturing and cultivating this cultural trait, even if not supported by a context within a country that does not practice it on a daily basis, a higher self of the Filipino, derived from their spirituality. I was moved by her sage but also by how the Filipinos in Paris behaved with an endearing amount

of full respect for one another. It was inspiring to see a generous amount of patience and empathy for one another at a community meeting!

Equally moving were the sights of Paris and its art displayed in museums.

A painting by Eugene Isabey, the Tentation de Saint Antoine, struck me—it is a struggle between temptation, or evil and its opposite, justice or goodness. It grabbed me like no other painting and I gasped as I saw it. I stared at it for a while and it stirred me within. I could not explain how after a few moments, my tears started to flow, perhaps in gratitude that I am witnessing this work of art in Paris, an artistic, soulful city.

Just around the bend, I saw this couple, relishing each other's presence, and the crowds watched them as they exchanged glances, positions, but mostly an endearing exchange of affection, which underscores the Paris of our dreams, the Paris of romance we yearn for, until we find that within us, is the true self-love and from that inner realization, an overflowing feeling of loving others, just like these loving *kababayans* whom I met, or Vanessa, who desires to give service to young French folks, to

de-stress their lives through a journey of wellness, spirituality and good health. She spoke of finding her life's purpose, of moving from London to France, and finding her answer on what to do with her life, after visiting Sacre' Cour Cathedral.

But of course, in one's quest for life's meaning, it is not found in simply the mind, or the logic of intellect, it is really about surrendering one's life to one's faith, and allowing the Universe to guide us through its infinite wisdom and finding a path of serving others, just as these featured folks have in Paris. Till my next series on Paris, France! Au Revoir! J'et Aime!

Prosy Abarquez-Delacruz, J.D. is a features writer for Asian Journal. She stumbled upon writing when she met NVM Gonzales, who introduced her to the beauty of live violin music from his friend, Nonoy Alsaybar. Since then, she strives to attend live musical events, particularly those created by her *kababayan* - musical artists!



RHIZOMES

Prosy Dela Cruz J.D.

Art is a way of life in Paris—it is part of their beings. It is reflected in the presentation of their plated food entrees, their creativity, their ingenuity, their daily expressions and dress styles that show that every part of their lives exude a high sense of respect for culture, for nation and oneself in France. Yes, it feels that way!

It is in Paris that I found an artistic self, choosing to wear a coral scarf with a brown scarf or to eat foods that please my sensual palate, and choosing to discard even bright red, but tasteless strawberries offered in their open markets, in favor of relishing sweet red raspberries. In the Parisian museums, in French food served in restaurants, in Bastille's open markets, in the displayed paintings, in the clothes, jewelry, and even in the clothes that are worn by French men and women, in their street musicians, and their preserved architectures, art is a part of the Parisians' DNA.

More than art, smiles are on the faces of the musicians in Paris. They have a certain zest for life, embracing life as it goes. The French men here declare their love for Maura, a friend of mine who traveled with me to Paris, France. These guys had not slept, following a full night of barhopping. They were determined to shower her with kisses to commemorate her first visit of Paris.

Until one probes and finds the dark corners, the dark places, the lives of the non-French, in particular, the Filipina nannies, cleaning ladies and hired help from African countries are not



Street musicians who were playing their music in Bastille, and in the subways of Paris



Maura Brito, my friend from Los Angeles, being flanked by sweet, generous French gay men, on their way home from club hopping at Bastille



Joy and Joan Salas inside the Museum d' Orsay



Vanessa Hunt, a Les Jardines du Marais staffer who shared her life's wisdom on spirituality and health with the author



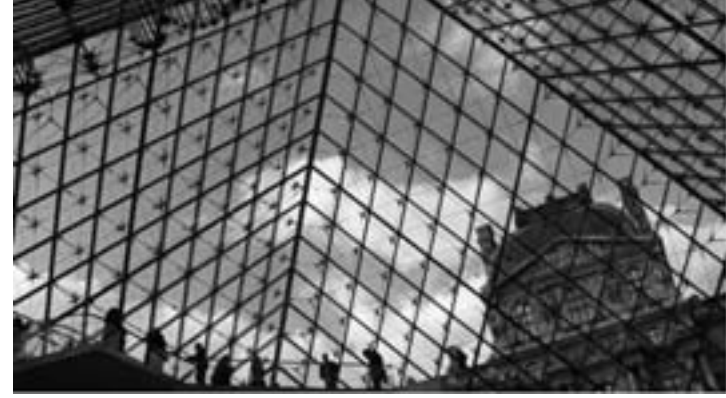
Helen Rose and Joy Lavitoria at the Runelagh Metro Station who generously made time to accompany this author to the Philippine Embassy



Eiffel Tower with all its lights at 9pm



Inside Museum d' Orsay, two bodies merging into one loving embrace



Inside Museum de Louvre



Flanking Ambassador Rora Tolentino and Consul General Maria Angela Ponce are the community leaders of FilCom in Paris, France, inside the Philippine Embassy



At Bastille's Open Market, where French, Lebanese and Greek teenagers spontaneously erupt into singing, dancing and clapping



Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Chemin Montant dans les hautes herbes*. Vers. 1872-1875



Inside Museum d' Orsay in Paris, France



Lisa Ibisate who graciously made time to have lunch with me, while shopping at Place de Clichy. While at lunch, she received four phone calls, a busy day for her. The dessert is decorated with raspberry-flavored Florentine cookies. Lisa spoke of her contentment, of living a life of balance, enjoying even the smallest portion of French food with the best balance of flavors, satisfying one's palate and spirit.