

## “As Wild As We Come”

Wawi Navarroza

19 August – 17 September 2022

Kristin Hjellegjerde London (London Bridge)

Private View: Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> of August, from 6:30 – 9 pm

A woman appears in a series of brightly coloured, stylised tableaux, draped in richly patterned fabrics, clutching ceramic vessels, an artichoke, a blue ribbon hooked over her fingers, a string of pearls between her teeth. This latest collection of self-portraits by Wawi Navarroza continues the artist's vivid, layered explorations into identity, place and belonging, with a specific focus on the female experience, motherhood and bodily transformation. Weaving together a multitude of references from ancient and contemporary cultures, *As Wild As We Come*, the artist's first solo show in London at Kristin Hjellegjerde gallery's London Bridge space, contemplates the never-ending formation and flux of self as we cross geographical, corporeal and spiritual thresholds.

Born in Manila in the Philippines, Navarroza's practice is rooted in a deep, embodied sense of place that is best understood through the lens of 'Tropical Gothic' – a term coined by Filipino national artist Nick Joaquin. Navarroza describes the Tropical Gothic as a fitting portrait of Filipino culture that is a syncretic blend of the local with a heady mix of Spanish Catholic and American Pop while remaining distinctly South East Asian. In terms of her own art, it provides a useful framework, or as she describes it, 'a container for everything that I can't exactly define – all of the things that I've been observing, living, breathing from childhood until now.' Her photographic works employ a process of in-studio collage in order to examine and disentangle this process of synthesis from both a very personal perspective and in relation to reductive stereotypes surrounding the Orient. Navarroza notes, for example, that the term 'wild' has often been used in association with the Orient to describe something unknown, dangerous or savage, but here, in the title of the exhibition, she reclaims the word as an expression of defiance, knowing, vitality and play.

This latest body of work marks a particularly transformational period for the artist in which she has become a mother and moved across the globe from Manila to Istanbul, a country which sits on the cusp of Asia and Europe, the ancient and modern world. Though both experiences were destabilising in different ways, the artist chooses to reflect on how they have enriched her perspectives of the world and renewed her connection to both her body and art. There is a distinct celebratory atmosphere throughout: in the riotous melding of colour, pattern and texture that – an aesthetic that recalls the artist's memories of fiestas in Manila – and in the depiction of birthday cakes, in a trio of still life works, that refer to the birth of Navarroza's child but also her own rebirth as a mother.

Among the most visceral of the self-portraits is a work titled *Vagus* (after the longest nerve of the autonomic nervous system in the human body). Here, a river of red, lacy fabric runs from the top of the image to pool around Navarroza's feet, evoking the appearance of blood, which as the artist notes, is 'both universally life-giving and intensely personal.' The artist appears seated on a bed with her legs open, a black wire extending from her stomach in a gesture to an umbilical cord and a collection of carnelian crystals at her feet. The stones make reference to the notion of healing and balance as well as continuity to planetary time, while the artist's pose, with her arm bent up around her head, mimics an exercise to relieve the vagus nerve system and reduce stress. In one sense, this is a portrait of vulnerability and exposure, inviting an intimate encounter between viewer and artist as Navarroza translates the private experience of childbirth and motherhood into tangible materials, but at the same time, she draws our attention to the artifice. A striped curtain on the left-hand side recalls the structure of a stage while the strip of yellow floral wallpaper behind the bed is loosely hung over a painted green grid.

Elsewhere, the artist's orchestration of the image is made visible through visual anomalies. In the work titled *The Shopper*, for example, the background is composed of different checkered patterns containing glitches where the grid overlaps or repeats itself. Navarroza, who also appears dressed in checkered clothing, stands in front of a roughly cut-out shape of a blue and white vase as if she, herself, is contained. As in many of the works, Navarroza brings together the contemporary with the ancient, the banal with the spiritual. There is a shopping bag filled with potatoes flung over her shoulder while she holds an artichoke heart with open palms in front of her chest, imitating a gesture of prayer. Meanwhile, a small rectangle of woven polychromatic, upcycled fabric, that's commonly used in the Philippines as a doormat, forms a halo behind her head. It is this slippage of meaning that makes the works so compelling; each time we return to the image, we are able to unlock new layers of symbolism and construct our own narratives afresh. In this way, Navarroza enacts her own kind of

resistance. Her bright, joyous collaged scenes rally against notions of seamlessness and stability in favour of hybridity, creative curiosity and transformation.

#### **About Wawi Navarroza**

Wawi Navarroza (b.1979) is an Istanbul-based Filipina multidisciplinary artist known for her works in photography. Her images navigate self and surrounding in constructed tableaux and self-portraits, as well as landscape and installation. She is informed by tropicity within the dynamics of post-colonial dialogue, globalization, and the artist as a transnational agent. As a female artist, Southeast Asian and Filipino, her works transmute lived experience to the symbolic while probing materials and studio practice; exploring the hybridity of identity, photography and place. Navarroza is a graduate of Communications Arts at De La Salle University, Manila. Shortly after, she received continuing education at the International Center of Photography in New York City with a Fellowship Grant from the Asian Cultural Council. For a few years she has been based in Spain where she finished her Masters in Contemporary Photography (Master Europeo de Fotografía de Autor), a scholarship awarded by Instituto Europeo di Design in Madrid.

**Solo exhibitions** include (Upcoming) *As Wild As We Come*, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London, England (2022); *Self-Portraits & The Tropical Gothic*, Silverlens Galleries, Manila (2019); *Medusa*, Silverlens Galleries, Manila (2017); *On Landscape & Some Dislocations*, Galería Patrick Domken, Cadaqués, Spain (2012); *When All Is Said And Done*, Artesan Gallery, Singapore (2008); *Saturnine: A Collection of Portraits, Creatures, Glass & Shadow*, Silverlens, Manila / McDermott Gallery, Siem Reap, Cambodia / ArtReflex Gallery, Saint-Petersburg, Russia (2007); *Polysaccharide: The Dollhouse Drama*, Blacksoup Project Artspace, Manila / Ateneo Art Gallery, Manila / La Trobe University, Bendigo, Australia (2005).

**Selected group exhibitions** include *Run with Wolves*, Lawrie Shabibi gallery, Dubai (2021); *Tonight The Air Is Warm*, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London (2021); *SF Camerawork*, San Francisco (2021); *Viva La Frida!*, Drents Museum, Netherlands (2021); *Anticipating the Day*, Silverlens, Manila (2020); *Taboo*, Vinyl on Vinyl, Makati (2019); *Not Visual Noise: Philippine Photography*, Ateneo Art Gallery at Areté, Quezon City (2019); *ART|JOG|11 Enlightenment*, Yogyakarta National Museum, Jogjakarta, Indonesia (2018); *Artists' Books for Everything*, Weserburg Museum of Modern Art, Bremen, Germany (2017); *Roundabout: Wawi Navarroza, Mark Valenzuela, Riel Hilario, Adelaide Central Gallery*, Australia (2016); *Surface Tension: Perspective on the Changing Landscape*, Alliance Française de Manille for COP:21 Paris (2015); *Still Moving: After Image*, South-East Asian contemporary photography survey show, Singapore Art Museum 8Q, Singapore (2014) and *The Hope & The Dream in Filipino: Contemporary Photography from the Philippines*, The Month of Photography Tokyo 2012, presented by The Photographic Society of Japan and Tokyo Museum of Photography, Tokyo, Japan (2012).

**Highlights and collections** She has exhibited widely in the Philippines and internationally, including the National Museum of the Philippines, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, National Gallery of Singapore (upcoming 2022), Singapore Art Museum 8Q, Hangaram Museum (Korea), National Museum of Fine Arts (Taiwan), Yogyakarta National Museum (Indonesia), Fries Museum of Contemporary Art & Museum Belvedere (Netherlands), Danubiana Museum (Slovakia), and in galleries in Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Laos, Cambodia, London, Spain, Italy, and Russia; with continued participation in international photography festivals and art fairs such as Art Basel HK. Her art has been surveyed in books such as "Photography Today" (Phaidon), "Contemporary Photography in Asia" (Prestel) and "Photography in South East Asia" by Zuang Wubin (NUS Press).

#### **About Kristin Hjellegjerde**

Established in 2012, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery has fast gained a reputation for exhibiting a diverse roster of innovative, international artists, both emerging and established, with strong theoretical and aesthetic bases.

Since its inception the gallery has embraced a collaborative, multicultural curatorial approach, maintaining a deep devotion to the artists it represents while fostering close relationships with museums and curators worldwide.

Drawing on her own international background, Kristin Hjellegjerde seeks to nurture new talent by offering artists a dynamic, inclusive platform through which they can be introduced to local and global clients. She works closely with other curators and collectors as well as developers and architects to develop unique and exciting exhibition concepts. In 2019, she curated 'Kubatana', a museum exhibition focused on African artists at Vestfossen Kunstlaboratorium, Norway and in November 2020, she joined forces with Jacqueline Goldenberg to launch JK Masters, an art consultancy that aims to present secondary market artworks to those who are looking for something unique and special of the highest quality and/or historic value. In October 2021, Kristin Hjellegjerde was featured in Monocle Magazine's Top 25 Global Entrepreneurs of 2021.

In April 2018, the gallery opened a space in Berlin, which was shortly followed by the launch of a second location in London, occupying a two-storey building in the vibrant neighbourhood of London Bridge. In June 2020, the gallery opened its first annual summer space in a converted shrimp factory in the beautiful coastal town of Nevlunghavn, Norway. Following its success, a second summer space launched in 2021 in an 18th century German castle forty minutes outside of Berlin at Schloss Görne. In Autumn 2022 the gallery will expand its presence in the US with the opening of a permanent space in Palm Beach.