

Art Fair PH: Wawi Navarroza's "Wild As We Come"

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Art Fair PH Artist Highlight: Wawi Navarroza

By [Gabriel Bohol](#)

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Cover Wawi Navarroza (Photo: Jojo Gloria)

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Explosive colours, flattened imagery, and historical markers. This is Wawi Navarroza. Istanbul-based Filipino artist Wawi Navarroza showcases her artistry at Art Fair Philippines with her *As Wild As We Come* exhibition. Through her self-portraits, Navarroza explores identity and self with a firm focus on motherhood. But much more lies beneath the surface. How does the idea of decolonisation fit into her work? How about the flatness of her photographs? The vibrant colours?

This article gets to know all that and the artist behind it all. This is **Wawi Navarroza**.

More from Tatler: Filipino artist Jana Benitez: “we don’t make art, it comes from within us”

As Wild As We Come Exhibit



Above ArtFairPH/Photo (Photo: Kryss Rubio)

Navarroza questions the meaning of “wild”. She highlights the use of the word in regard to the East—being seen as savage, uncivilised, and possibly dangerous. Through her work, she redefines the word’s meaning to express vitality, bravado, and strength.

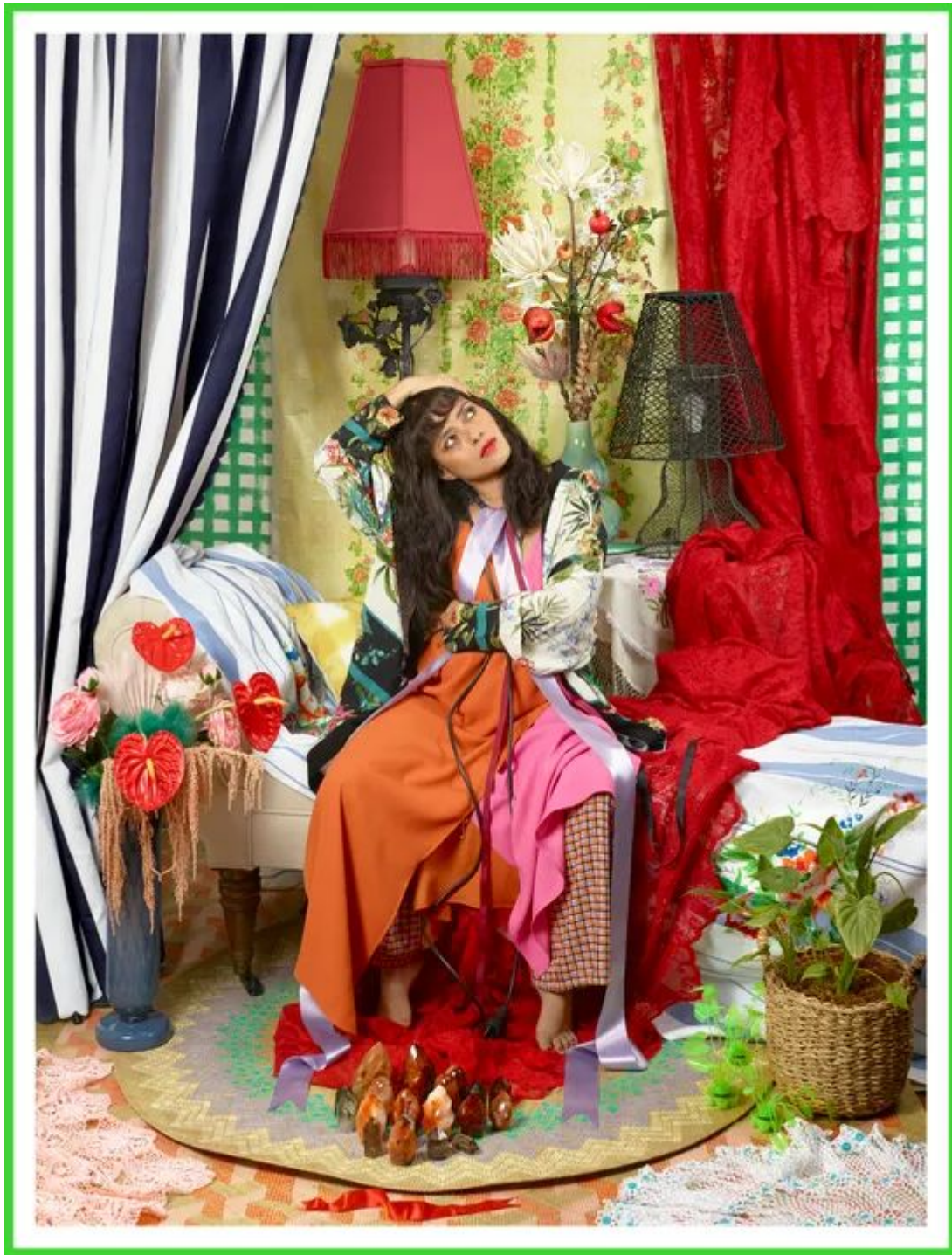
As Wild As We Come hones in on the nature of motherhood. Not only does it serve as a historical marker for when she birthed her son Gabriel, but as a statement on the disturbing notion of a woman’s worth when bearing a child. Notice how the title is *As*

Wild as We Come, not 'I'. It's not just her own experience. The lack of a support system is a burden that all women bear, and she wanted to open up that conversation through artwork that mothers can reflect on and resonate with.

Navarroza's own experience with this is more tangled in the art world. She was grappling with the pressure to continue creating, but her bodily transformation brought a change in every direction. Though it took her a couple of years to sort it out, she has been reborn and emerged stronger.

Read more: [Art Fair PH 2023: Lineup of this year's exhibitors and artists](#)

The Creative Process



Above La Bruja II : Vagus (Self-Portrait Rebirthing the Self), 2022 Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle, cold-mounted on acid-free aluminum by Wawi Navarroza

Some artists like to think up a concept first, and then work on the piece. Some prefer to just wing it and create what speaks to them. For Navarroza, it's a mix of both. When asked why she moved to Istanbul, she answered simply: "It's where I needed to be". As a Filipino living in Türkiye, she can peer into the East and West to get a better view of the state of both environments. By juxtaposing things from many different eras and places, she opens up an interesting conversation on our syncretic culture as Filipinos.

Read more: [Galeria Paloma offers a 'phygital' experience at Art Fair PH 2023.](#)

The Style



Above Mouth of Pearls: Oriental & Overseas (Self-Portrait), 2022 Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle, cold-mounted on acid-free aluminum by Wawi Navarroza

Navarroza explores the psychological and interior worlds, and self-portraits are her natural way of expressing that. But every piece does not represent just one thing. She uses her pieces to mark key points in her history, criticise the westernisation of the East, and

play tricks on the viewers' eyes. And she spectacularly does this. Using dazzling colours that are familiar to the Filipino eye, she challenges the presence of the West in Asia. She aims to decolonise and free Asian culture from the shackles of westernised thinking.

You may have noticed that most of her self-portraits feel very flat. It may sometimes look like it's photoshopped, but that's what she wants you to believe. The arrangement of every set piece is intentional to make the viewer think twice and look closer into the most minute details.

Read more: [Markus Jentes' exhibition rings the new year with auspicious Asian symbols](#)

The Artist



Above Wawi Navarroza (Photo: Jojo Gloria)

Know who you're not. And be that.

- Wawi Navarroza -

Navarroza identifies as an artist rather than a photographer. “Not that one is better than the other,” she said. Starting with black and white self-portraits, she decided to add more flair to her work through vibrant and outlandish (by Western standards) colours.

When asked about the people she looked up to, she gave a long list of names. Her mentor, Judy Sibayan, who tracked her into photography as a medium, friends and family, and many women artists like:

- Agnes Arellano
 - Julie Lluch
 - Cindy Sherman
 - Sonia Delaunay
 - Helen Frankenthaler
 - Alice Neel
 - Pacita Abad
 - Nena Saguil
 - Frida Kahlo
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