

MCAD
COMMONS

THE LIBRARY
OF UNREAD BOOKS
HEMAN CHONG & RENÉE STAAL

LEARN WHAT YOUR FRIEND, YOUR LOVER, YOUR BOSS
ARE REALLY SAYING TO YOU—IN THE LANGUAGE THAT
EVERYBODY USES BUT NOBODY SPEAKS—BODY TALK!

HOW TO READ A PERSON LIKE A BOOK

with dozens of dramatic illustrations

GERALD I. NIERENBERG AND
HENRY H. CALERO



PRESS
KIT



MCAD Commons is as an upcoming exhibition programme of the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila. It is conceptualised as a programmed space that is removed from the main gallery space of the museum.

Conceived as a project to continue the expanding activities of the museum, MCAD Commons brings MCAD's singular programming to a larger audience that allows for the engagement with creative development, ideas exchange, and support of the artistic process across the areas of research, art practice, and curatorial discourse.

Following the thinking that art is reproducible, the choice of space is developed in-step with the creative formation of the show rather than as a passive, neutral receptacle. The varied formations of the shows will tie in with the community that sustains the site and the process of art making.

THE LIBRARY OF UNREAD BOOKS

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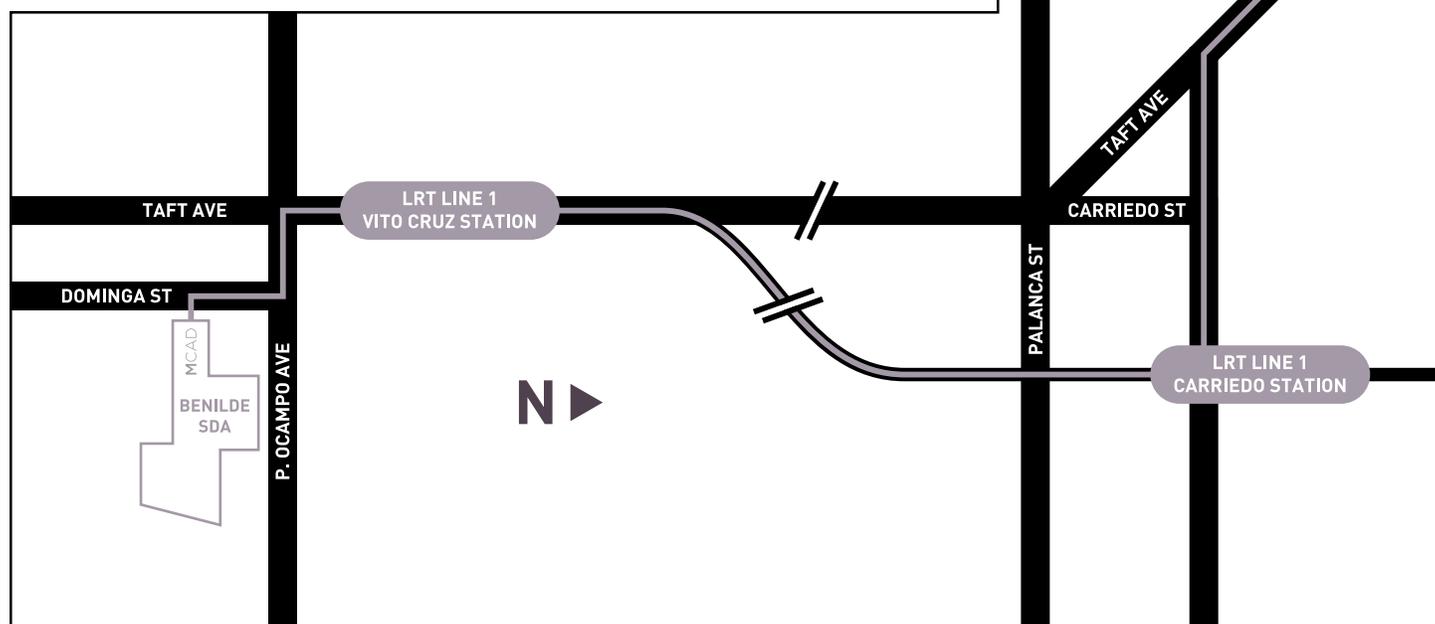
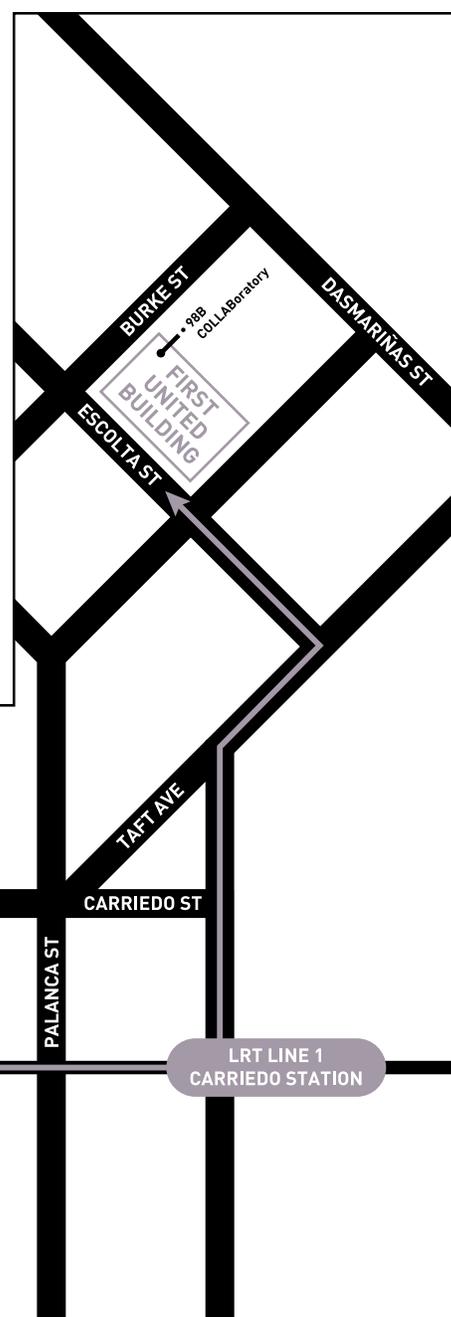
29 June – 26 August 2017

Tuesdays to Saturdays

5th Floor, First United Bldg, 413 Escolta St,
Binondo, Manila 1006 Philippines

The second iteration of a ten-year-long project, *The Library of Unread Books* develops from the artist's deep-seated longing for books. Open to the public, the reference library is made up of donated books that are unread by their previous owners. By receiving and revealing that which people choose not to read, the Library is the result of a collective gesture that traces the perimeters of unwanted knowledge.

The Library of Unread Books is a reference library where every single volume you see on the tables has been donated by an individual who has, for some reason or another, not read the book they have in their possession before. It is a simple way to displace an object that has once been in an extremely private place to a site where it is accessible by anyone who comes into this space that is open to the public. The books are arranged randomly, in stacks, and during the course of the exhibition, their position will shift around a lot. We like that it remains consistently confusing and surprising. The journey of *The Library of Unread Books* began on 23 September 2016, as part of a generous residency at NTU Center for Contemporary Art in Singapore. After this iteration as part of this group exhibition, it will move to other locations. Most of these future sites are not confirmed yet, but we hope that the library will never be in storage. We would like the library to enter the permanent collection of an institution. It's a piece that balances nicely between an art work and a part of the public program of a institution. We'll run it ourselves for ten years, accumulating as many unread books as possible in that time, and having many interesting conversations with the people who come and read. Please approach one of the gallery caretakers if you would like to donate a book. We take you at your word that it is an unread book that you are donating to us, much like a handshake. In any case, we're happy that these books have managed to detach from your shelf (or under your bed) and are now available in the public domain for anyone who wants to read them. Please feel free to sit and read or browse for as long as you like and return the book to any stack you prefer.



ESCOLTA ST, BINONDO, MANILA

Established in 1594, from the Spanish word “escolter” which means “to escort,” Escolta is the commercial heart of the country. During the colonial period, Chinese immigrant merchants made their fortune through the Manila-Acapulco Trade. In the middle of the American period, en route to political and economic independence, business activity in Escolta was at its peak paving way for a more cosmopolitan lifestyle not only in the Philippines but also across Asia. It then became Manila’s fashion and culture hub with the rise of boutiques, department stores, restaurants, cinemas, movie production houses, and theaters constructed by world-renowned Filipino and foreign architects following the Art Deco, Neoclassical, and Beaux Arts styles. Not only that, the addition of the Manila Stock Exchange and the electric tram line, tranvia, contributed to the grandeur of the Queen of Streets, that is Escolta.

The culmination of World War II left numerous edifices in Escolta deranged, abandoned, and forgotten; and by the 1960’s, financial institutions slowly moved their offices to the newly developed land of Makati City. Not only that, the construction of modern and air-conditioned shopping malls with new cinemas affected the decline of its business and cultural centers. But not to be lost to its post-war downfall, Escolta still houses historical archives and museum artifacts immortalizing the heritage and years of progress the Philippines had.

An LRT ride away to Carriedo station, just beside the Santa Cruz Church, one can easily behold the quaint but formidable Escolta Street. Here rises the Calvo Building, built it 1938 and designed by the architect Fernando Ocampo and owned by the Calvo-Mortera family. With its orange and white structure, it is one of the fine examples of Beaux Arts architecture up to this day. It is the home of today’s DZZB or GMA Network as well as the Calvo Museum. This museum is a must-visit for any history buff and Old Manila aficionado. Here, one can view historical publications, Filipino music sheets, and old photographs of Manila’s socialites, vintage movie posters, bottle caps, and post cards.

There is also the Capitol Theater with its exemplary Art Deco architecture designed by Juan Nakpil in 1934. It still features a faded frieze, a rare double balcony interior design as well as a bas-relief molded by the Italian sculptor Francesco Ricardo Monti. Not far from this once-illuminating establishment is the Regina Building, originally named as the Roxas Building and owned by the Roxas family which was then bought by the De Leon family. From this, it was renamed after Don Jose Leoncio De Leon’s first wife, Regina. It’s domed and white structure is a mix of Neoclassical and Beaux Arts styles where its first three stories were designed by Andres Luna de San Pedro, Juan Luna’s son, and an additional fourth floor was made by Fernando H. Ocampo.



Escolta Street. Photo source: [John Tewell on Flickr](#)



Present day Calvo Building in Escolta. Photo source: [ronniebernardo.blogspot.com](#)



Present day Capitol Theater. Photo source: [Spot.ph](#)

Other sites to catch include the Don Roman Santos Building built in 1894 following the Neoclassical architectural style. It was occupied by the Monte de Piedad Savings Bank, the American Red Cross Hospital back in World War II, and the Prudential Bank in 1952. Renovated in 1957, the Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) still stands up to this day. Another one is the TEOFF Center or the Natividad Building which was built by Spanish architect Fernando dela Cantera Blondeau in the early 1920's following the Beaux Arts style. It was the home of the largest book firm during pre-World War II Manila, Philippine Education Company (PECO), as well as the Insurance Commission.

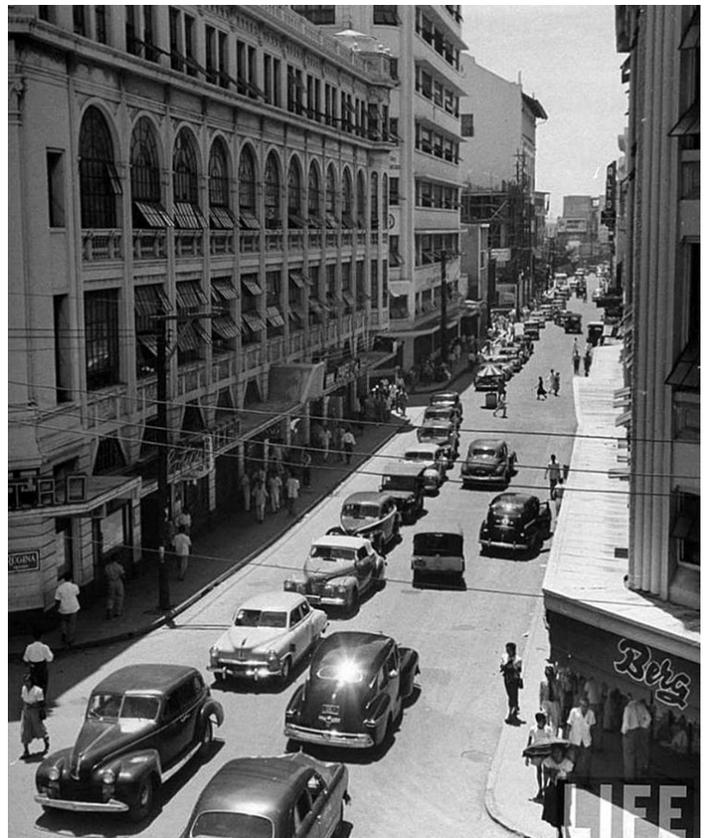
Escolta, the Queen of Streets, is not dead despite the emergence and preference of the youth towards trendy hangout spots in Makati and Greenhills. It is still an avenue to actively engage with Manila's rich history. In addition to this, it is becoming a host for artistic events, food, music, and performance festivals, and fashion markets.

Escolta once hosted a vintage market, spearheaded by the 98B Collaboratory, inside the decrepit Berg Department Store. With the aim of preserving the street's history and novelty quality, various goods were sold such as retro furniture and home décor, one of a kind soda bottles, brand-name apparel and shoes, and even worn out books and comics. 98B has also remade the Panpisco Building into an art space called PAN where artists and performers can showcase their creations and productions.

Interesting enough, the youth came up with their own initiatives in salvaging the beauty and significance of Escolta. Under the flagship of Escolta Revival Movement (ERM), managed by businessmen, history lovers, and art enthusiasts, is a youth sector called The Heritage Conservation Society (HCS-Y). Their advocacy is to spread awareness among young people about the creative energy and potential as well as cultural mark Escolta can leave despite them being ahead of its time.



Present day Escolta. Photo source: [Philippine Star Supreme](#)



Escolta Street. Photo source: [aisaipac.com](#)

FIRST UNITED BUILDING

Formerly called the Perez Samanillo Building, the five-story First United Building was constructed in 1928. One of the fine and surviving examples of Art Deco office architecture, this red and white structure was designed by Andres Luna de San Pedro, son of the famous painter Juan Luna. Its geometric patterns such as the boomerang-like chevrons and spiral arches gave a classic but progressive overall feel to the building. With all these, the First United Building won the Best Décor Award in 1928.

Previously owned by Luis Perez Samanillo, one of Binondo's old Spanish families, during the booming economic period of the Philippines, countless shareholders vied to purchase the building due to its elegant style. But as World War II came to a close, most of the investors fled to the United States, leaving a generation of hopeful businessmen to rebuild the ruins of Escolta. By the 1960s, a vast amount of stocks was acquired by the First United Building Corporation. Thus, the name was changed from the Perez-Samanillo Building to its today's name, First United Building.

As Asia's fashion hotspot, the First United Building once housed the famous Berg's Department Store, the go-to shop for Manila's most lavish during the American period. It was also the headquarters of numerous movie production companies of the likes of Dolphy and Nora Aunor, two of the greatest Filipino entertainment icons.



Present Day First United Building. Photo source: shaharaine.wordpress.com



Stalls at the 98B Collaboratory Future Market at the First United Building. Photo source: shaharaine.wordpress.com

Back in 1951, Sy Lianteng, the current owner, first bought the ground floor from Ernst Berg, owner of the aforementioned Berg's Department Store. Lian Teng then expanded his flagship in 1982 as he claimed helm to the 3rd, 4th, and 5th floors. The ground floor was by then occupied by the United Coconut Planters Bank while the second floor housed the Philippine First Insurance Corp., and the First Optima Realty Corp.

Up to today, the First United Building is still under the hands of Sy Lian Teng. It is now reincarnated as an art and cultural hub. Located at the mezzanine level, it is home to the First United Building Community Museum. As the second museum to open in Escolta, last May 16, 2015, it serves as a storehouse for the varied and colorful objects, artifacts, memories and dreams to preserve and remember the legacy of Sy Lian Teng. Not only that, the museum highlights information about Escolta's past, present, and future efforts by independent organizations in rediscovering its hidden spark and glory.

One of these groups is the 98B Collaboratory, formed to create a close-knit community of artists, designers, and curators. With their united vision and hard work, they founded a monthly vintage and art market called Future Market. Located at the lobby of the First United Building, this quaint shop is a haven for one-of-a-kind thrills and quirks such as handmade accessories, comic books, vintage shoes, vinyl records, and unique novels and paintings.

Indeed, the First United Building has been successful in establishing a fresh and modern melting pot for all things creative. Set against the backdrop of the haunting yet picturesque Escolta street, it is no wonder why this classic edifice is dubbed as a Modern Artifact. It is a testament to the Philippine's culture and architecture back in its prime and a reminder of the burgeoning artistic possibilities the First United Building and Escolta as whole promises to present over time.

HEMAN CHONG

Heman Chong (b. 1977, Muar, Malaysia) received his M.A. in Communication Art and Design from The Royal College of Art, London in 2002. He is an artist, curator, and writer whose work is located at the intersection between image, performance, situations and writing. For him, art is a “conceptually charged investigations into how individuals and communities imagine the future,” which take shape as “objects, images, installations, situations and texts.”

In 2006, he co-produced a writing workshop with Leif Magne Tangen at Project Arts Center in Dublin where he co-authored “PHILIP,” after the cult author Philip K. Dick, a science fiction novel created through seven days of intensive discussions with a group of writers. It posits the idea of creating a book through sound collaboration with the effect of eliminating the superiority of authors in contemporary publishing. He further breaks down the conventions of books, writing, painting, and design in his series entitled *Cover (Versions) (2009-2013)*. Made up of over 180 abstract and graphic paintings or representations of book covers, the project is a reflection of the relationship between textual and non-textual forms, the distribution of cultural content, as well as his learning process as a painter.

Other notable exhibitions and works include *Stacks (2003-ongoing)*, *Calendars (2020- 2096) (2004-2010)*, *LEM1 (A Science Fiction and Fantasy Book Store) (2012)*, *Twenty Plots for Things to Come (2013)*, *The Part In The Story Where We Lost Count Of The Days (2013)* which displayed in three spaces and cities: Rossi & Rossi in Hong Kong, Future Perfect in Singapore and The Reading Room in Bangkok, his collection of stories with Christina Li entitled *Stationary (2014)*, and *Ifs, Ands, Buts (2016)*.

He has shown internationally from London, Seoul, New York, Milan, Amsterdam, Dublin, and Berlin. He has participated in group exhibitions at the Tate Modern, De Appel Arts Centre, Taipei Contemporary Art Center, and San Francisco Asian Art Museum among others.

He also took part in international biennales such as the 1st Yichuan Biennale (2016), 20th Sydney Biennale (2016), 10th Gwangju Biennale (2014), Asia Pacific Triennale 7 (2012), Performa 11 (2011), Momentum 6 (2011), and Manifesta 8 (2010) and has represented Singapore at the 50th Venice Biennale.

His works are included in the permanent collections of Art Sonje Center (Seoul), Kadist Art Foundation (Paris), M+ Museum (Hong Kong), NUS Museum (Singapore), Rockbund Art Museum (Shanghai), and the Singapore Art Museum. He is represented by Rossi & Rossi (London/HK), Vitamin Creative Space (Beijing/ Guangzhou), and Wilkinson Gallery (London).

He is currently working a novel entitled ‘The Book of Drafts’ which will be published by Polyparenthesis in 2019.

Chong lives and works in Singapore.
www.hemanchong.com



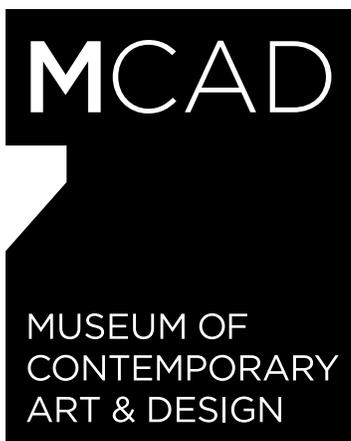
Heman Chong

RENÉE STAAL

Renée Staal received her Bachelor’s degree in Language and Culture Studies at the University of Utrecht, while her Master’s degree in Arts and Heritage: Policy, Management, and Education at the Maastricht University. Her MA thesis was on “Donald Judd at the Chinati Foundation and Boijmans van Beuningen: An Exploration of Artistic Autonomy, Exhibition Space and Viewer Experience.”

She is a creative archive manager and researcher based in Rotterdam Area, Netherlands. She trained at the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) and was an intern at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. She worked as a curatorial assistant at the Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art as well as a studio and production assistant for Alexandre Singh. She is an independent translator, editor, and researcher focusing on contemporary art, visual art, art history, and literary criticism. She has worked with (designed by) Erick van Egeraat as an archivist and creative manager.

From the Netherlands, she travelled to Singapore as the co-founder and chief librarian of Heman Chong’s 10-year project entitled *Library of Unread Books*. She is currently working at the National Gallery Singapore.



MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND DESIGN

Housed within the stunning architecture of the College of Saint Benilde's School of Design and Art (SDA), designed by local architect Ed Calma, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD) is the only space in the Philippines that approximates an international contemporary art museum and gallery space.

Located within an art college, MCAD's programmes are molded in line with the school's courses: film, fashion design, animation, multimedia art, photography, arts management, production design, technical theater, architecture, as well as music production. In step with this, MCAD produces outstanding exhibitions with world-wide standards by collaborating with professional artists and curators, both local and international.

MCAD provides the experience and exposure to contemporary art works, usually only found outside the country. Its contemporary art exhibitions, projects, as well as other cultural and art-inspired undertakings showcase the possibilities of technology and new media through its internationally-designed programme of contemporary art exhibitions enhanced by an ever-widening educational platform.

www.mcadmanila.org.ph

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At Benilde, learning in its many forms is encouraged. Spiritual creative pursuits, artistic endeavors, service to the community, awareness of environmental issues, and concern for the common good are all part of the Benildean education. The College's learner-centered philosophy is founded on the belief that each student is endowed by God with talents and gifts that should be understood, appreciated and nurtured.

Images available upon request.

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