

The Balikbayan Artist Book Launch

Pre-Event Order Info:

Signed copies of *The Balikbayan Artist* can be ordered directly from the author. Contact her through <https://eileenrtabios.com/contact/>

Book Summary

Farm-laborer-turned-artist Vance Igorta returns to the Philippines as a balikbayan after nearly fifty years in the United States. He is a member of the Manong Generation, the large diaspora of Filipinos who worked physically demanding jobs, mostly in California's agricultural fields.

Coming home to a country on the brink of becoming a dictatorship, Igorta's paintings shift from abstractions to didactic, political art to better reflect the rebellion that he eventually joins. Didacticism also facilitates his meditations on the impact of leaving his birthland to become a powerless Manong and then an impoverished artist of color in New York.

The Balikbayan Artist takes readers from the early twentieth century to the present day when Vance Igorta's art is being discovered anew. His legacy is validated for allowing his art to address the tensions of his time instead of keeping it solely entrenched in aesthetic concerns. The artist's choice reflects what Vance Igorta learned as a voraciously self-educated person: that in circumstances where power corrupts, what makes anyone and everyone dangerous is love.

BIOS of AUTHOR AND DISCUSSANTS:

Eileen R. Tabios has released books of poetry, fiction, essays, art and experimental prose from publishers in 11 countries and cyberspace. Recent releases include the novel *The Balikbayan Artist*; an art monograph *Drawing Six Directions*; a poetry collection *Because I Love You, I Become War*; an autobiography, *The Inventor*; and a flash fiction collection collaboration with Harry K. Stammer, *Getting To One*. Other recent books include a first novel *DoveLion: A Fairy Tale for Our Times* which was subsequently translated by Danton Remoto into Filipino as *KalapatingLeon* (released in 2024 by UST Publishing House). Her body of work includes invention of the hay(na)ku,

a 21st century diasporic poetic form, and a first poetry book, *Beyond Life Sentences*, which received the Philippines' National Book Award for Poetry. Translated into 13 languages, she has seen her writing and editing works receive recognition through awards, grants and residencies. More information is at <https://eileenrtabios.com>

Michael Caylo-Baradi is an alumnus of The Writers' Institute at the Graduate Center (CUNY). His work has appeared in *The Adirondack Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Galway Review*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *Hobart*, *Third Wednesday Magazine*, *MigoZine*, and elsewhere. He has also written reviews for *New Pages*, *The Halo-Halo Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Latin American Review of Books (UK)*, *PopMatters*, among others. He is the author of *Hotel Pacoima*, released by Kelsay Books in 2021.

Rachielle Ragasa Sheffler was born in Baguio City, Philippines. She immigrated to the United States in her early twenties and settled in Southern California with her big Filipino family. She belongs to the San Diego Writers, Ink, and International Memoir Writers Association. She was a featured writer in the *Making Space, Taking Space AAPI Workshop* funded by a California Humanities grant. She contributes to the *Halo-Halo Review*, a magazine promoting English-language works of Filipino authors in all genres. She launched her Substack as *Baguio Girl* with a series called *The ABCs of Recovering Ilocano*. She is currently editing her memoir and family history.

Reviews

With *The Balikbayan Artist*, Eileen R. Tabios continues to innovatively imagine how Kapwa can be manifested in fiction. Kapwa is an expression of the indigenous Filipino worldview that speaks of the mythic depth and breadth of the Seen and the Unseen realms. As with her first novel *DoveLion*, a new classic for indigenous futurism, *The Balikbayan Artist* moves across a wide range of themes and topics—art, history, youthful idealism, how power corrupts, revolution, immigration, loss and desire, among other concepts. The novel breaks out of the confines of a modern/colonial frame and returns us to the wondrous world of myth-making. This is how Story becomes Medicine. —Leny M. Strobel, Editor, *Babaylan: Filipinos and the Call of the Indigenous* & Co-Founder, Center for the Babaylan Studies

“Penguin Random House Southeast Asia goes from strength to strength with each passing year. Some of its most noteworthy books came from the pen of Filipino writers.... The *Balikbayan Artist* is a novel by US-based writer Eileen R. Tabios.
—Danton Remoto, *The Manila Times*, Sept. 5, 2024

In her novel *Balikbayan Artist*, she explored issues of displacement, individuality, and the complex dynamic between the diaspora and the homeland. She claims agency over personal and communal histories by using experimental poetry to subvert conventional narrative. By emphasizing self-definition, survival, and the importance of creativity in negotiating multiple selves, her writing pushes feminist discourse forward.
—Professional & Future English Teachers’ Association’s “Babae sa Panitikan: Spotlight on Contemporary Filipina Writers,” Women’s Month March 2025

After exhilarating the poetry world with her marvelously imaginative poetry, Eileen R. Tabios has turned her ever-experimenting, intellectual mindset to the novel. As she did in poetry, her fiction-writing is expanding the landscape of the genre. The *Balikbayan Artist* reveals her abilities to address and connect a wide variety of subjects in a manner that touches the hearts of readers. Based on my many years of enjoying her poetry, I know that each of her novels promises to be as unique as each of her poetry collections.
—Sandy McIntosh, poet/memoirist and bestselling author

A daughter of the diaspora, Eileen R. Tabios has redefined the word ‘Balikbayan’ to signify existential longing and fortitude. Her gift as a writer is that she allows us space to perceive a myriad of human experiences: desire, loathing, horror, outrage, grief, love. It is this universality that awakens us—to counsel us, Always, always: discern with compassion.
—Aileen Cassinetta, Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow & Co-Editor, *Dear Human at the Edge of Time*

“Buy this book!”
—Ninotchka Rosca, *State of War*

“The Balikbayan Artist, blends art and artists with resistance to dictatorship, in a prescient—and sometimes hilarious—commentary on U.S. politics.”

—Louise Dunlap, *Inherited Silence: Listening to the Land, Healing the Colonizer Mind*

“Tabios’ novel depicts an influential Filipino painter whose work speaks truth to power throughout the country’s dictatorship....the novel espouses art as a form of love and protest in the face of corruption.”

—Isabella Pechaty, *BARNARD Magazine*, Spring 2025

Filipino-American History Month Recommendation for “adult, literary fiction.” This story weaved art and politics so well that I became so engrossed in both. What an impeccable writing on color and dictatorship.

—“katonthejellicoe” Bookstagramer, October 2024

For those who didn’t know, I am a Fine Artist. I don’t really paint for years now, or draw freehand. So I am really devouring this book. This book is inspiring me to start again.

—“jdlreads” Bookstagramer, October 2024