

## Ang Pambansang Museo ng Pelikula

*At long last, a home for movie memorabilia  
(now how about a similar shelter for TV's artifacts?)*



In the country's new film museum, screen sweethearts Nestor de Villa and Nida Blanca look out from a wall-size blow-up, right beside a suit worn by Leopoldo Salcedo.

Just two years after the first movie was screened in France in 1895, cinema arrived in the Philippines. The startling imagery was really nothing fancier than a bunch of Frenchmen throwing snowballs at each other, and certainly still not appealing enough to draw Filipinos away from the popular entertainment at the time, the [zarzuela](#).

But by the 1950s, Philippine cinema was among the most advanced and respected in the world. Our films were shown in movie theaters all over Asia.

It just seems typical of us though that such a storied past was in danger of being forgotten. Many of the films from that period are lost, missing, or in the hands of foreigners overseas.

That may soon change with the soft opening on July 29 of the country's first film museum, Ang Pambansang Museo ng Pelikula. August 19 will be its grand opening, with many showbusiness icons in attendance.

The site is in what used to be the secluded, semi-occupied [Mowelfund](#) building in a leafy cul-de-sac in Cubao. No one would have guessed its importance to the showbiz industry. Now it's been transformed.

Exuberantly designed with plenty of eye candy, the museum is packed with memorabilia from over a century of movie-making in the Philippines -- from the American colonial documentarists who covered the Philippine-American War to the petite Jolina (represented by a look-alike mannequin dressed in a pink mini).

In between are a who's who of stars: movie posters of Fernando Poe Senior and Junior; Kislap magazine covers with the teeny-boppers Guy and Pip; a regal life-size picture of the legendary director [Gerry de Leon](#) (our Orson Welles); gowns once worn by Pilita Corrales, Nida Blanca, and others in their films. One special room will be devoted to FPJ, once all his memorabilia arrive. TV monitors play clips from black and white movies, including some of the earliest wet-look scenes in local cinema.



Film camera, trophies, and gowns from yesteryears

Another great thing about this museum is that it recognizes that cinema is much more than its stars. Also displayed are some of the movie cameras used by several generations of filmmakers, as well as editing machines and [Lamberto Avellana's](#) vintage Moviola. My cameraman Egay Navarro's family donated a sound dubber from the 1970s, equipment for recording music and voiceovers that was used by his now US-based father Joe Navarro, a film engineer for the big production studios in Quezon City, now all closed (the last of them, LVN, just shut its doors less than a month ago). Most of the materials in the museum were in fact donations from film professionals and stars.



Cameraman Egay Navarro and family with Mowelfund director Boots Anson-Roa and the sound dubber used by Egay's father Joe Navarro

Curated by film historian and [Mowelfund Film Institute](#) executive director [Nick Deocampo](#), the museum follows a historical logic, starting in the ground floor displays of cinema's turn-of-the-century beginnings in Manila, through the dark corridor of the Japanese period, then ascending up the stairway of stars to the golden age of the 1950s, the second golden age of the 70s, and so on... until we get to [Raymond Red's](#) Cannes winner, Anino, and other recent creations of the prolific Filipino film industry.

The only thing missing from the museum are the movies themselves. Nick and a band of dedicated archivists have been combing the globe searching for vintage Tagalog films. There

have been amazing finds, such as the 1937 **Zamboanga**, Fernando Poe Sr.'s first film, found in the US Library of Congress in Washington, DC. But the professional-standard archive (with freezing temperatures) that could permanently house these classics has yet to be built. In Thailand last April, my docu team and I paid a visit to that country's own movie museum, smaller than ours, but it was in the same compound as its impressive government-funded film archive housing over 5000 films, including shorts and documentaries.

The movie industry has been in a deep funk for the last decade or so, struggling against piracy, rising costs, and the ascendancy of television. But as Deocampo said on opening night, "The only way to salvage this industry is to learn from the past. Recall how they did things then and perhaps we can discover a way to rescue the industry."

But as movie stars have migrated in droves to TV, and with most Filipinos now deriving their entertainment pleasure from the small screen, perhaps it's time that the television industry starts thinking about a museum of its own, before all the memorabilia from its even shorter history get scattered to the winds.

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