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Small circular handwritten Urdu text.

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Large, central handwritten Urdu text in a highly decorative, calligraphic style, possibly a main title or a significant verse.

Veronica Corpuz

Mapping the Portals of Her Spirit, 2020

Digital print on paper

As a Filipina American woman born in Pittsburgh, I have struggled, tussled, ignored, denied, questioned, cross-examined, re-examined, performed, and explored my racial/cultural identity-identities. In an interview I watched recently with Thích Nhất Hạnh, he spoke of the term *inter-being*. He describes in the simile Clouds in Each Paper: "If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow: and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are."

Resting in this space of inter-are or inter-being, I find the infinite ocean of possibility where my Filipina heritage and American immersion fluidly mix. I am not one without the other. Each shapes the way I write, cook, parent, speak, pray, meditate and....

This map, I have titled "Mapping the Portals of Her Spirit," is the beginning of a new series of poems, mixed media and meanderings through memory and time. I started with a pile of photographs of places in Pittsburgh where, as a young child, I performed traditional folk dances from the Philippines. I tried to trace back and remember the many venues in Pittsburgh where I danced barefoot in the street, where I balanced a candle upon my head, where I hopped among clapping bamboo, where I felt most alive and in my body.

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Tagalog Baybayin

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r s t u v w x y z

I wanted to connect the Philippines to Pittsburgh in a direct way, declaring this connection that has existed long before my parents immigrated to the Steel City, so I decided to create my map entirely out of the ancient Baybayin script. As the cartographer, I realized that I was mapping places where I felt most liberated and alive. The circles opened up like portals directly into my spirit. A deep magic started to happen within me.

This is my first meditation

The space of no-thought:
I am movement
I am spirit
I am the bird
suspended in air
I am two clapping bamboo
I am the high bench
I am the fan & castanets
I am the little duck
I am the handkerchief
I am the light of the candle
I balance upon my head