"Love in the Time of Pandemic" brings together two creatives and Asia Society Asia 21 Young Leaders, collaborating to touch hearts through art.

Together in this project are photo-documentarist Xyza Cruz Bacani, and poet-author Quintin Pastrana.

Between Xyza’s powerful images and Quintin’s poetry from his latest book, “Ambahan: A Love Story”, spring seeds of hope and stubborn inspiration.

"Love in the Time of Pandemic" celebrates small acts of kindness and innate, instinctive, indigenous empathy which, together, allow great feats and save lives.

Your purchase of this set - which comes with 12 Postcards of Xyza’s images, a copy of Quintin’s Ambahan: A Love Story and Manila House’s signature cocktail - will help raise funds for an ambulance and in setting up a community library through the Library Renewal Partnership, for Xyza’s hometown in Bambang, Nueva Vizcaya.

This project is brought to you by Asia Society PH in partnership with Manila House. Also by Fuji Film, which supports Xyza in her photography, and by FEU Publications, publisher of Quintin’s works.

Exhibit runs from 11th of February to 11th of March 2022 at Manila House.

Visit bit.ly/ASPHFeb11 to know more.
IMMOLATION

There are many things I wish to say, but only one starkly felt in the gloaming:
My heart burns through kerosene and all I have is this star. Embracing self and shadow,
I know we walk under Light.

see the full version of the poem on pp.38-39

INFLECTION

Some hours I wish I never met you; but I did. Up to the point when I was mumbling underneath my breath - saying just that - as a sleepwalker knows, yet trudges anyway: waves enamored of the reef

And as my ship ran farther aground, fraught with a scar tissue - I disembarked to trace the scent of the wind in your hair, our tongues parched in fear - marching past the point we could not be: closer to the taste of rain.

see the full version of the poem on pp.40-41

MOTHER'S DAY

I'm asked how I will miss you - what might be left after all this fading. I will say this:
Every time I choose kind words over the throwaway barb,
Self-depreciation over the basement of self-pity

Each time I give, yet want for nothing; or pray, and find that my call
is its own answer.
Anytime i cook with grace

or fold the sheets, part my hair, stanch a cut, or floss my teeth: This sacred ordinary

When each glance at my beloved brings me to full redemption;
Where I learn to both hold on and let go, until the dark tides pass and starts show the shore. Your face will always be there:
All that remains is kindness.

see the full version of the poem on pp.50-51
REST

When were you last held by the sacred ordinary; but the last time your fever broke where rivulets traced your limbs like dew, cooled by the wind, then stanched by the garish sun who relinquished it to the sea?

see the full version of the poem on pp.68-69

NOCTURNE

It was almost perilous save for the moon's captive gaze. Climbing down the locked stairpath into foliage that barely cloaked the painted river's face, I parsed each footstep with the current's breathing, and all eyes observing how I wandered in the pensive nightfall's hearth, and what began to stir as I traced how far we had come; then braved past the trees' eclipse, to stand unsheathed in light, and fall into the scheme of things

see the full version of the poem on pp.54-55

ORPHEUS REDUX

He knew he'd died of his wounds - He sensed he was in a dream; He kept walking into it He wished it would never end: He fought each day of waking.

He lurched in fumes of sleep - 'til She drew him into her breath

see the full version of the poem on pp.60-61
PRESENT

My smartphone's battery died - then everything came to life:
I traced the footsteps of words; city light constellations
waft in this winter's gaze that stilled grains from peat to glass, to melt like music in the mouth.
We welcomed each note's heartbeat, each pause a longing that drew in every breath: then love spread like applause as we grabbed the invitation to breathe in and inhabit a moment that was hiding in plain sight.

see the full version of the poem on pp.62-63

STILL LIFE

It's so silent, you can feel the wind-trails comb the ripples: in that cross-hatch of our lives is a stillness that breaks you, gently 'til you fall into a cadence that floats to the horizon as the first star

see the full version of the poem on pp.74-75

SINGULARITY

We chose to no longer be hostage to the elements: dust clouds nipping at our heels, Broken weight on the pedal: The hum turns to rattling, then a sonic drill-bit whirl, 'til there's nothing left but silence We're right on the cusp of time itself, taken at the flood. We're not waiting anymore for some sign or permission to make this quarterlife count. We're stars and constellation held aloft by gravity

see the full version of the poem on pp.72-73
TRANSCEND

If I dwell on this trifle, I begin to remember how an ordinary day can write chapters of a book. And here I am, stuck in a puddle that strayed from this flood that seeks to rejoin the sea.

see the full version of the poem on pp.80-81

SYMPHONY

I've been caught in the crossfire of a diesel engine's wrath while the world as I know it recedes before me into the sheltering horizon as lapiz lazuli waves turn into turquoise windows. I'm bathed in drizzling starlight while the silence envelops my breathing, just like music coming from another room: my life played out before me, each memory woven like constellations for my soul.

see the full version of the poem on pp.76-77

THE NIGHT SKY ON MY BACK, INEBRIATED

It's as if I was dangling from my tailbone as I looked through this singularity - that nourishing darkness hinged on stars of parchment, hanging on your every word, telling me to just breathe and let

see the full version of the poem on pp.52-53
Full version of the poems in English, Filipino and Mangyan transcription can be found in:

**Ambahan: A Love Story Poems**
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