FIFTY YEARS OF ART WITH AYALA FOUNDATION

ALEX C. GREGORIO

THE AYALA Foundation was established by Joseph and Mercedes McMicking on December 14th, 1961 and known as the Filipinas Foundation until 1990. Under the leadership of its Chairman, Jaime Zobel de Ayala, the foundation inaugurated the Ayala Museum building designed by National Artist for Architecture, Leandro V. Locsin, in 1974 (1). The museum’s mission was to study and preserve Philippine culture through research, exhibitions and publications. First envisioned as an art and history museum in the 1950s by the late artist, Fernando Zobel y Montojo, the Ayala Museum was established in 1967 as a project of Ayala Foundation. Through carefully chosen collections and educational programmes, the foundation actively promoted, alongside education and social development, a heightened sense of heritage and artistry among Filipinos.

In 1995, another division was added to the foundation, the Filipinas Heritage Library. Formerly housed at the Ayala Museum until it moved to the landmark Nielson Tower building, the library underscored the importance Ayala placed on cultural and social development through the promotion of books and a love for reading and learning. The Filipinas Heritage Library pioneered the creation of an online network of resources across the country called LibraryLink which brings together catalogues of Philippine Studies from over one hundred libraries. The library publishes both printed and electronic books on Philippine history and culture, and houses over 13,000 volumes on Philippine history, art, language, religion and the social sciences, 2000 rare titles, rare books on microfiche, maps and an extensive collection of slides, photographs and musical records.

In the past four decades, the Ayala Museum has mounted a host of outstanding exhibitions giving life and form to the foundation’s vision of a rightfully proud people with a strong grasp of their history and culture. In 2004, the Ayala Museum moved from its original building to a larger home designed by Leandro Y. Locsin, Jr. The new building was dedicated to the Filipino people by Jaime Zobel de Ayala in celebration of the 150th anniversary of Ayala Corporation (2, 3). In 2008, the museum opened its permanent exhibition of 10th–13th century archaeological gold formerly in the collection of Leandro and Cecile Locsin. The stunning examples of pre-colonial gold showcased in the collection are remarkable not only in number, but more so in how they provide tangible evidence of a mature level of artisanship among pre-colonial Filipinos. The Ayala Foundation recently celebrated its 50th anniversary with the launch of the ground-breaking book Philippine Ancestral Gold. Written by Florina H. Capistrano-Baker, John Guy and John Miksic, the book was co-published with Singapore’s NUS Press.

The Ayala Museum and the Filipinas Heritage Library are testaments to Ayala Foundation’s mission of eradicating poverty in all its forms, facilitating access to knowledge and learning, and instilling pride in being Filipino. Both programmes continue to preserve, interpret and promote awareness, understanding and appreciation for arts and culture in the Philippines.

Jaime Zobel de Ayala is the Chairman Emeritus of Ayala Corporation, the holding company of the Ayala Group of Companies. Born in 1934, he completed his early education in the Philippines then went to Harvard University, where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Architectural Sciences in 1957. As Managing Partner of Ayala y Compañía in 1967, Mr Zobel oversaw the transformation of the Ayala conglomerate from a family business into a publicly listed corporation. This signalled the beginning of what many refer to as Ayala’s Golden Age—a period of rapid expansion, growth and success. He was President and Chairman of Ayala Corporation from 1983 to 2005. He served as Chairman until 2006.

Beyond his expertise in entrepreneurship, Mr Zobel was also a diplomat and continues to be a practising artist. He
The new Ayala Museum building, designed by Leandro Y. Locsin, Jr, was inaugurated in 2004. (Credit: Ayala Foundation/Filipinas Heritage Library Collection)

Jaime Zobel de Ayala, Chairman Emeritus of Ayala Corporation. (Credit: Ayala Corporation)

Shell Series XIII by Jaime Zobel de Ayala, which appears in the book The Island (1996). (Credit: Copyright by Jaime Zobel de Ayala)

Untitled by Jaime Zobel de Ayala, which appears in the book Journeys with Light (2005). (Credit: Copyright by Jaime Zobel de Ayala)

was the Philippine Ambassador to the Court of St James in London and the Scandinavian countries from 1970–1974. He has won awards for his artworks and photographs both locally and overseas (4, 5). He is the first Filipino photographer to be conferred “Licentiate” by the Royal Photographic Society. He has garnered similar commendations from the French and Spanish governments, such as the French Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Jaime Zobel’s other honours and distinctions include: Management Man of the Year award (1987) from the Management Association of the Philippines; Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) from the University of the Philippines (1991); Hero of Philanthropy (2008) from Forbes magazine; and Legion of Honour, Rank of General Commander (2009) from the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

As Chairman Emeritus, Jaime Zobel continues to infuse Ayala’s corporate culture with his passion for the arts as he expands the conglomerate’s involvement in the country’s cultural and artistic development. At fifty, the Ayala Foundation forges ahead with programmes in social development and also in Philippine art through the Filipinas Heritage Library and the Ayala Museum.