

Editha Mesina
Artist Statement

My recent project, *Filipina Activists*, explores women in Filipino human rights organizations active in the United States. Due to the current Philippine President Duterte's "War on Drugs" and the incarceration and murders of human rights and environmental rights defenders, these activists mobilize to end the suffering and deaths in the homeland. United in their support of Filipino communities, these activists advocate for the struggle of Filipinos at home and in the diaspora. With economic policies that force millions of Filipinos, over half of them women, to migrate abroad these activists work with communities to advocate for an equitable and peaceful homeland and connect these issues with relevant issues in the U.S.

The women in this project bring to their portrait session an object that has inspired their activism. Grace brought a seashell that triggered an awakening of an interest in the Native American communities living around her hometown in Long Island. Her research into these communities ignited her search to be connected to her own identity as a Filipina American who left her homeland as a young girl. Donna holds a photograph of a Cora Agovida nursing her child. Cora was at the time incarcerated for working as a women's rights activist. Donna's activism was awakened when she was a teenager living in Kuwait with her parents who were overseas Filipino workers, workers who had to leave their homeland due to poor economic policies and be separated from their families. Through their experiences as immigrants, Grace, Donna and the other women in the series have reawakened as human rights activists to use their voices to demand social justice.