

SPEECH BY MR MICHAEL KOH, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD AT THE LAUNCH OF THE BOOK “METRO CUISINE: COSMOPOLITAN FINGER FOODS” ON 27 AUGUST 2009 AT THE SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Ambassador Minda Calaguian-Cruz,

Ladies & Gentlemen

Welcome to the Singapore Art Museum’s Glass Hall.

My first encounter with Filipino food was as an architectural student. It was in a home of a Filipino architect whose wife was a home chef extraordinaire. I have never forgotten one dish she whipped up, chicken halang halang with a twist, as it had chunky slices of mango to go. I have searched high and low for this dish and have yet to find it again. Since then, I have enjoyed other Filipino meals of chicken adobo, bbq milk fish and sinigang finished off with mango ice cream and San Miguel beer. All this might make it seem like I live to eat, but in actuality, I eat to live.

2 I associate eating with memories of places and people. For example I will never forget the natural Filipino warmth and friendship at the meal where I first tasted Filipino food. I will also never forget crispy pata, an entire roasted pork leg, served at a small cozy restaurant in old Manila. It was a huge dish, full of sinful but yummy fat, but what made it all more

memorable was when the “orange-shirted” supporters of then Mayor Atienza swept in for a meal, during the height of the Manila mayoral elections.

3 You might wonder why then is the CEO of the NHB launching this book on Metro Cuisine? Let me give you three reasons to justify my presence:

- a) First, food reflects the cultural heritage of the country. To me, food shows the amount of absorbance of multi-cultural influences and the innovation and creativity of the people in coming up with the unique food recipes. Filipino food reflects the many years of Philippines rich history and civilization, from the indigenous cultures to that of Spanish influences and even with some Chinese inspiration. Filipino food is reflective of the mestizo culture and rich cultural diversity of the country.
- b) Second, enjoyment of food brings a greater cross understanding of cultures and heritage. In partaking each other’s food, we can share in the multi-cultural diversity of communities and can discover cultural commonalities. Such soft experiences can bond us together and create a better understanding of each other. Enjoying the taste of Filipino food is an easy first introduction into the grace and beauty of the Philippines.

c) Third, food brings people together. The love of food brought many people together in the creation of recipes for this book Metro Cuisine. The recipes are for Filipino finger foods but with a twist. The recipes are contributed by Singapore based Filipinos, and also by Singaporeans and other expat friends in Singapore.

4 This blending of flavors, speaks volumes about the kind of relationship that exists today not only between Singapore and the Philippines, but between Singaporeans and Filipinos. Over the past 40 years, our bilateral relationship has moved beyond the formalities of the living room into the cozy, intimate friendship of the kitchen. We have been through storms together, we have mutual aspirations for our bilateral partnership and our region, we have worked closely together on a wide number of issues and projects. These shared experiences are the firm foundation on which we have built this bilateral partnership, and from which we are perfectly poised to move forward for the next 40 years and more.

5 With all this said, I am thus especially delighted to be here tonight to witness the launch of Metro Cuisine: Cosmopolitan Finger Foods. I am extremely happy that this project is one of the commemorative activities for the 40th anniversary of Singapore-Philippine relations, and commend the Management Committee of the University of the Philippines Alumni

Association in Singapore (UPAAS) for coming up with such a unique and apt concept. In this context, I am pleased to note that the proceeds of this book will go to an endowment fund for scholarships at the University of the Philippines. In this time of economic uncertainty, there is no better investment than in the next generation – the ones who will carry on what we have started in this lifetime. My congratulations once again to the UPAAS for the successful launch of Metro Cuisine.

6 Let me close with a bit of NHB advertisement. We are currently working closely with the Philippines cultural agencies, private collectors and embassy here to bring a Fiesta Filipino across our national museums from October 16 this year through to early 2010. There will be artifacts, such as the Nino Dormido carossas, a Spanish altar, pre-colonial gold ornaments, paintings by well loved Filipino artists, contemporary art, film and movie stars. We hope to work closely with you, the Filipino community to bring your culture and heritage to Singapore.

7 In final closing, I congratulate the Embassy of the Philippines in particular Ambassador, the University of the Philippines Alumni and all the food enthusiasts who came together to put this book Metro Cuisine: Cosmopolitan Finger Foods together. Thank you and have a pleasant evening at the Singapore Art Museum.
