



# *Manila from Within*

## *Book Review of Walk Manila*

*John Brian de Asis*

*Through succinct yet bright prose and vibrant graphics, Walk Manila by Lorelei DC de Viana sheds light on the richly built heritage structures and landscapes of the City of Manila, presenting locations from within each of the city's historic districts. Popular and iconic city landmarks like the Manila Metropolitan Theater and Far Eastern University go together with humble and often overlooked gems such as the funerary monuments of the Manila North Cemetery. The book deviates from the trope of tour compendia by featuring tour circuits not often taken by the city's visitors but contributes to the unraveling of Manila's truly colorful narrative and its place in the national consciousness. The book provides handy maps of different tour routes within each district of the city as well, presented in youthful graphics that once were contemporary yet nostalgic. The book invites both the veteran and the uninitiated to take a closer look at the heritage of Manila and to discover them through our own experience of space. These sites often remain uncharted, waiting for the viewer to uncover them from the realm of the everyday.*

### **Walk Manila**

Author: Lorelei DC de Viana

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Figure 1. Cover of "Walk Manila"  
designed by Patricia Mae T. Ferriol

*Walk Manila* by Lorelei DC de Viana was first published by Far Eastern University Press in 2019 with subsequent reprints in 2021 and 2022. Its publishing interestingly coincides with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the university's Liberal Arts program, under its predecessor, Far Eastern College. The book presents 100 historical sites and structures spread over the fifteen districts of the city, with accompanying maps outlining possible tour routes that the readers can take if they decide to embark on a visit to the sites. Each site is accompanied by an essay showing succinctly the significance of each. The book goes beyond the mere parade of each building and site's grand narrative historical facts, as some information presented shows links of the site or the person associated with it to other aspects of social history or even links to other sites in the country.

The sites featured were chosen based on their official designations accorded by cultural agencies such as the National Historical Commission and the National Museum, as well as sites considered to be heritage-at-risk, and representative of each district's unique cultural heritage.



The choice of sites included in the book is noteworthy as it includes more prominently urban landscapes such as plazas and parks, many of those featured, would often be mentioned in passing only about specific heritage buildings, as in the case of the Plaza San Lorenzo Ruiz in Binondo, which often would only be a footnote to the discussions of the Binondo Church. The book deviates from the typical Manila tour book trope by expanding its represented heritage landscapes, including many that are not in the typical tour circuits of Manila such as Plaza Moriones in Tondo, and Plaza Anti-Imperialista in San Miguel. Funerary heritage landscapes such as La Loma, Chinese, and Manila North Cemeteries are also noteworthy additions to the list, as these sites indeed are a treasure trove of historical narratives, personages, and architectural jewels.

However, this book, owing perhaps to its methodology of prioritizing declared heritage sites in its roster, included most sites that were originally built during the colonial periods. It shies away from recognizing structures that decidedly belong to the post-war modernist eras, a few of which such as the Capitan Luis Gonzaga Building in Santa Cruz and the Ramon Magsaysay Center in Malate are worthy of recognition. Modernist structures are among the most at-risk

Figure 2. Excerpt from the book featuring the Manila Cathedral and the tour map inserts

sites as their place in heritage discourse is nascent, and still considered highly contentious. It must be noted however that more modernist structures were only recognized and declared as landmarks by the cultural agencies beginning in 2019, so a future expansion or second volume of the book featuring such sites may be worth pursuing.

Another aspect of the book that is worth praising is its book design by Gil R. Vegerano Jr., and the cover design, maps, and illustrations by Patricia Mae T. Ferriol. The design presents the contents with a nostalgic yet fresh graphic design that is at once accessible and utilizes vintage elements such as color schemes and font choices to great effect.

Overall, the book presents Manila's heritage in an approachable way and ultimately demonstrates that heritage is indeed just within our midst, if we care to look. At its heart, *Walk Manila* is an invitation to generations young and old alike, to explore the city in which they find themselves. Indeed, as a Manileña herself, the author put it best in her introduction: "It is only by treading and venturing through Manila's urban fabric can local...cultural nuances and quirks be better experienced and savored." *Walk Manila* won the National Book Award under the Lifestyle Category in 2022.

Figure 3. Detail of the map inserts in the book showing the Tondo and Santa Cruz tour routes.

