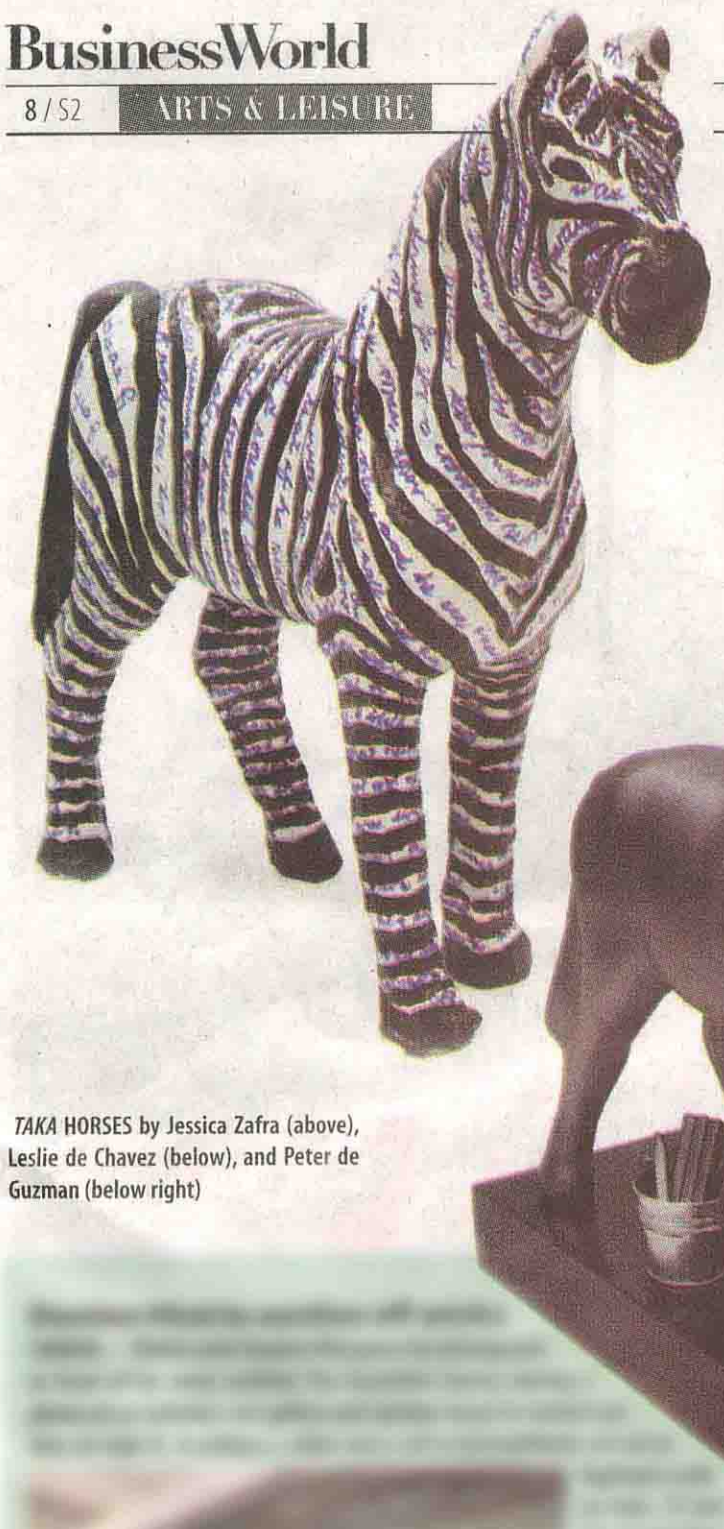


TAKA HORSES by Jessica Zafra (above), Leslie de Chavez (below), and Peter de Guzman (below right)

BY **SAM L. MARCELO**, *Reporter*

Modernizing the traditional

One way of saving traditional art from stagnation and eventual extinction is to have contemporary minds put a new spin into it.

Such was the reasoning behind *Isang Daang Katao, Isang Daang Taka*, an exhibit featuring 100 papier-mâché pieces, or *taka*, designed by 100 individuals who are mostly University of the Philippines (UP) alumni.

Among the prominent personalities participating in the show mounted by the Manlilikha Artisans' Support Network, an organization that envisions the melding of traditional art and contemporary practice, are National Artist Abdulmari Asia Imao, Sen. Loren Legarda, Dinky Soliman, editorial cartoonist Jess Abrera, and writer Jessica Zafra.

Joining them are established and emerging artists, as well as three artist collectives: Dakila, Neo-Angono, and Kalipunan ng Sining at Kultura ng Pasig (KSKP).

"It's interesting to see how they treated the *taka* in a wide variety of ways and it's also wonderful to see how it both relates and veers away from their usual art-making," said Manlilikha President Mitzie Icasiano.

Mr. Imao, for example, created a mean-looking red *sarimanok*-horse hybrid that incorporates popular Moro motifs and resin extensions. "Even if it's warlike, it's also humorous. I'd like to think that he had fun while reworking the *sarimanok* design he popularized," she said.

Ms. Icasiano's personal favorites include Leslie de Chavez' sleek stallion and sculptor Peter de Guzman's elaborately decorated royal blue horse.

"Mr. De Chavez took a simple paper figure and turned it into something that looks like stone or metal by using graphite. It's quite deceiving because it's very light when you lift it," she said.

Mr. De Guzman, the man behind the Ninoy Aquino monument in Makati, experimented with objects he was already used to handling. His papier-mâché horse features a jingling tassel made from copper wires and bullet cartridges — materials he is comfortable with from his usual work.

Some contributors weren't content with mere embellishment. Viewing the entire exhibit will show *takas* with their legs broken, their bodies opened up or grafted with spikes and other extensions.

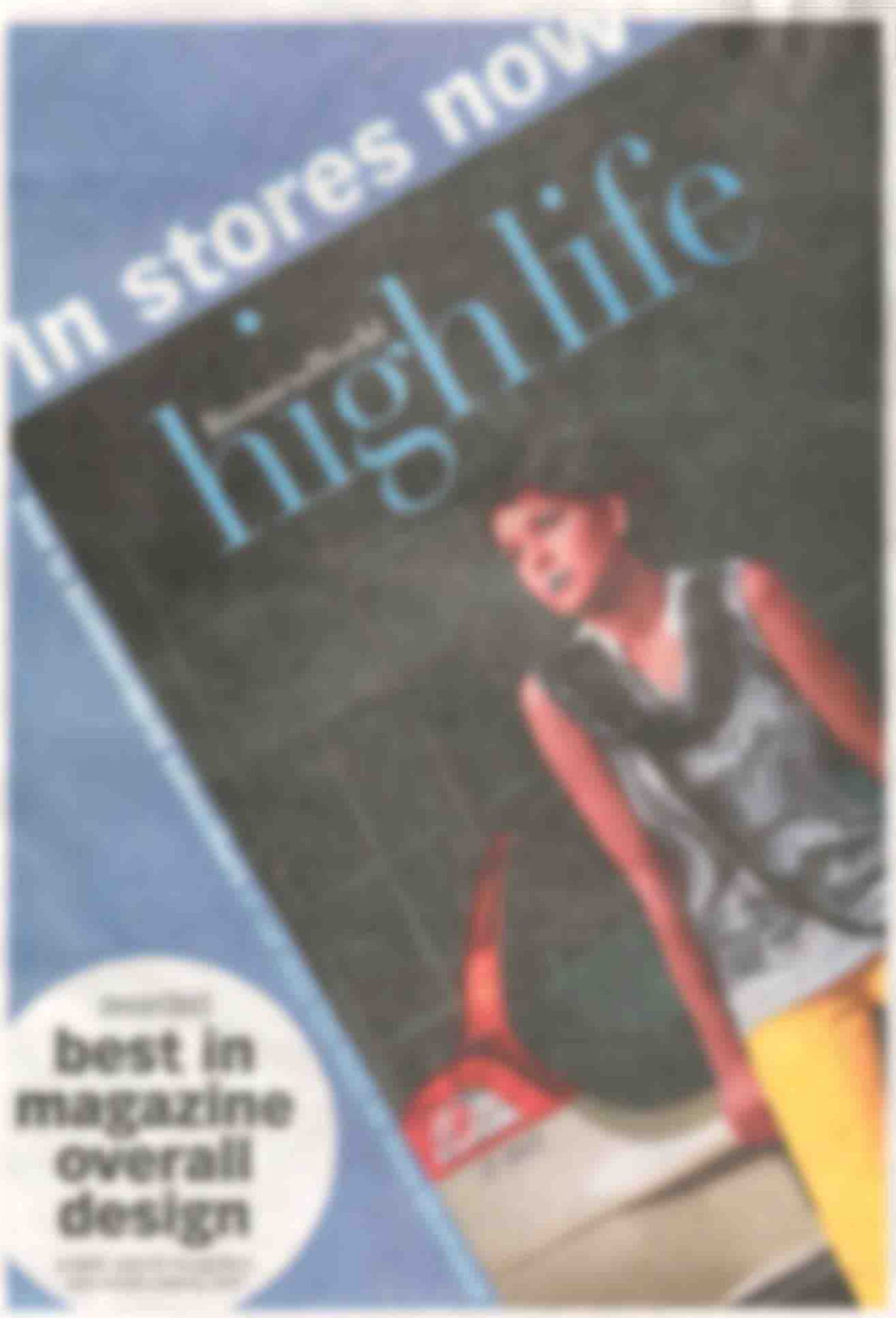
The only guideline participants had to stick to was to make the silhouette of the horse or country maiden (*dalagang bukid*), two of the traditional *taka* designs, distinguishable.

"You see how broad the possibilities are and that's one point we want to make: traditional art is infinite — all you need is the creativity and imaginative elasticity of contemporary practice," Ms. Icasiano said.

Taka-making, originally from Paete, Laguna, is in danger of disappearing because the wooden molds used to create the papier-mâché pieces have eroded over time.

"We want to commission woodcarvers to make traditionally designed molds so that artisans can continue to make *takas*," Ms. Icasiano said.

She added that contemporizing the *taka*, or any traditional craft such as basket-weaving or pottery, doesn't necessarily mean a complete overhaul. "We respect traditions but we want the artisans' crafts to reach an audience beyond their towns. Instead of remaining static, why not bring in the innovative spirit of today's artists?"

Isang Daang Katao, Isang Daang Taka, *an exhibit that is part of UP's centennial celebrations, is on view at the Sala'am Conference Room of the Romulo Hall in UP Diliman until Sept. 20. The* taka *works will be auctioned off for the benefit of the Asian Center museum collection and the outreach projects of Manlilikha Artisans' Support Network. Starting bids range from P1,000 to P50,000. While viewing is free, people who wish to participate in the auction must pay a registration fee of P1,000, inclusive of a catalogue. For more information, call Lilia Marquez at 927-0909 or Mitzie Icasiano at 0927-8749098; E-mail info@manlilikha.org; or visit www.manlilikha.org.*

JESS ABRERA (above) and Aba Lluch Dalena's takes on the *dalagang bukid*