

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Social Realism, by Guillermo

Review Author: Rene B. Javellana, S.J.

Philippine Studies vol. 37, no. 1 (1989) 112

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Book Reviews

SOCIAL REALISM IN THE PHILIPPINES. By Alice Guillermo. Manila: Asphodel, 1987. 112 pages.

If anyone is qualified to write about social realism as an art movement in the Philippines, it is Alice Guillermo. She has not only catalogued and commented on the works of the Social Realists, and popularized them through her articles in the national weeklies *WHO* and *Observer*, but has also known these artists personally and worked with them closely. This slim volume is the fruit of one such cooperative work. Edgar Fernandez, "Egay" to most, and Jose Tence Ruiz, two of the most prolific Social Realists, did the design and layout of the book. Egay, an accomplished photographer, had the difficult task of preparing the transparencies for the volume.

The book has five chapters, a short concluding section, and a bibliography of useful reading material. Three chapters are devoted to the Philippines, the remaining two situate Philippine social realism in the wider international movement. The first chapter reminds us that social protest has been part of the Filipino painters' artistic heritage. It found its earliest expression in the works of the master Luna, found its echo in the Commonwealth period in the debate between "art for art's sake" and "proletarian art," and so on till our days when heightened repression during the Marcos regime and its concomitant economic crisis brought about "an upswing in social realist art." The next two chapters are a competent summary of the issues and history of social realism in other lands. The fourth is a discussion of the themes or issues, forms, and style of Philippine social realism. The fifth and last is a presentation of the career and representative works of nine artists: Pablo Baens Santos, Orlando Castillo, Papo de Asis, Antipas Delotavo, Leonilo Doloricon, Edgar Talusan Fernandez, Renato Habulan, Al Manrique, and Jose Tence Ruiz. Then follows a general section on other artists.

The volume is a testament to the efforts of these artists who went against a trend that made art merely decorative and forged art as a tool of protest and hopefully, social change. These artists singly, or as a group in an organization like *Kaisahan* wrested art from its generally innocuous role in society to one that jolted people's sensibilities and awakened them to the harshness to which a repressive society had inured them.

But there is a disconcerting note to the whole book. It opens like a dyptich of contrasts. When Guillermo presents social realism elsewhere one gets a sense that here, indeed, are artists working within a movement. Here is Courbet living out his dictum *faire de l'art vivant* or Daumier his motto *Il faut etre de son temps*; there are Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco fired by zeal for the Mexican Revolution. But when Guillermo presents the Philippine side of the dyptich, and lapses into formal and thematic considerations, one does not get a sense that the social realists of the Philippines are fired with one all-encompassing vision such that they speak with one voice when they "expose or lay bare the true conditions of Philippine society as well as point out solutions by which these conditions are changed and transcended to achieve a truly human order" (p. 50). Could it be a deliberate oversight of the author that she does not discuss the political underpinnings of the social realists' art, or is this in fact the state of the art: visionaries who see clearly what's wrong, who each have their solution, but have yet to gel social realism as a movement?

The book's last paragraph dates it or will date it. The original referent seems to have been the Marcos regime, the before-EDSA era; but social realities are quickly changing as the Philippines continues to bubble in ferment. Thus the book's last paragraph takes on new meanings: is it prophecy about the future, hence, indictment that the present is not much different from the past? The book concludes: "art, in its social and political dimensions, is a vital part of the historic moment, of lived life in the present struggle, at the same time it projects a vision of a new human order that has inspired our hearts and minds" (p. 110)

Rene B. Javellana, S.J.
Department of Theology
Ateneo de Manila University

ANGELS IN STONE: THE ARCHITECTURE OF AUGUSTINIAN CHURCHES IN THE PHILIPPINES. By Pedro G. Galende, O.S.A. Manila: Gabriel Formoso Publishing, 1987. 526 pages. illus.

Those who feed on glossy, colorful, if at times vacuous coffee-table books will find Fr. Pedro G. Galende's hefty volume disappointing. The book's pictures are all in uninspiring black and white, many repetitious—facades, buttresses, elevations, and long shots of naves—some poorly taken, betraying the hand of the amateur.

But Fr. Galende has no pretensions to being a professional photographer or an art historian. If anything, his book is the record of an idyll, of a love for the numberless churches which the *gigantones agustinianos*, his predecessors, built in the Philippines. There were some three hundred towns under the tutelage of the Augustinians, Fr. Galende points out, and his book is both town history and art history by way of notes about two hundred or so places where today there stand records of the Augustinians' monument-making and monumental achievement.