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Manila's School of Painting

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Notes & Comment

Manila's School of Painting

For lack of funds, the *Real Sociedad Economica Filipina de Amigos del Pais* had to close the doors of its School of Drawing on May 16, 1834. This school, the first of its kind in the islands, had the great Damian Domingo as its director and with his early demise active interest in such an institution waned.¹ The need for such a school, however, was felt among the more progressive businessmen and social circles in Manila; and eleven years later the consuls or members of the Royal Tribunal of Commerce, a quasi-governmental entity to promote and regulate the trade and commerce of the country, addressed a petition to the Governor General for the establishment of another School of Drawing and Painting.²

The principal supporter of this move was Mariano Roxas y Ubaldo, younger brother of José Bonifacio Roxas and Margarita Roxas de Ayala, one of the leading creole families of that epoch. Of the three children of Domingo Roxas, the outstanding businessman of his generation, who died imprisoned at Fort Santiago for alleged complicity in the revolt of the Tayabas regiment in 1843, Mariano showed a deep interest in the fine arts. Although he had graduated in law from the University of Santo Tomás, he did not practise his profession assiduously, and neither did he immerse himself in business as his father, brother and sister had done. As a member of the tribunal of commerce, he found there were idle funds

¹ See the author's monograph on "Damian Domingo, Filipino Painter," *Philippine Studies*, 9, (January 1961), 78-96.

² Data on the school was gathered by Prof. Helen Tubangui at the behest of Fernando Zobel de Ayala from the National Archives in Manila, Consulado A-2 Carpeta 2a, Nom. 3-18, while the author possesses the holograph letter of Jacobo Zobel on behalf of Lorenzo Rocha dated July 13, 1891, addressed to Minister Antonio Ma. Fabie of Ultramar.

lying in its treasury—so why not use them for a valid artistic purpose?

On May 21, 1845, Roxas, jointly with the other members, José de Monchacatorre and Juan Vicente Marcaida, addressed the petition to General Narciso Claveria claiming that the school was needed "for extending knowledge in this branch of the fine arts, so that craftsmen in general can acquire that level of perfection, of elegance and of excellent taste which will help them progress, and consequently aid the prosperity and expansion of commerce." They cited the port of Barcelona which had a School of Drawing besides a school for chemistry and a nautical academy. Spanish monarchs, from the time of Charles I (father of Philip II), had always encouraged and supported this and the other arts. Since the tribunal, they added, was the entity in charge of promoting this aspect of commerce, it recommended that funds from the mercantile deposit intended "for public education and worthwhile commercial works" be used for the purpose—and what better application can such money have than for a School of Drawing? In other parts of Spain there were similar schools, led by the Academia de San Fernando in Madrid.

The recommendation found a responsive ear among government officials. Governor General Claveria endorsed the petition two days after to the Assessor, who agreed with the tribunal members, and the Auditor General declared himself in conformity with the suggestion. Thus, on June 10, 1845, Claveria authorized the establishment of the school and praised the tribunal for its patriotic zeal in having inspired its creation. "This government," he grandiloquently declared, "which will always support all worthy enterprises, has the paternal duty of supervising the well-being of the people over whom it has tutelage and direction."

Queen Isabel II in Madrid subsequently confirmed on March 13, 1846, the action of her representative in Manila, and authorized him to hire and pay a professor at the rate of ₱1,200 per annum, with free passage to and from the peninsula should one be selected from Spain. Furthermore, the sum of ₱4,000 was authorized to be spent for a lithographic press, busts, original paintings for models, and other effects.

Shortly after the approval by Claveria, Roxas found himself in Europe for the purpose of lifting the embargo on his father's properties. The embargo had been placed after the arrest of his father, and although his sister Margarita had secured a royal pardon from the Queen, the interdiction was not to be lifted until some years later, after he had instituted the proper legal procedure in Madrid. Mariano traveled in Europe while waiting for the slow wheels of bureaucracy to move, and had visited the Louvre, the Prado and

other museums, where he realized the absolute necessity of having in Manila suitable models for his young countrymen to study and emulate. Thus, on June 8, 1848, he addressed a letter to the Queen partly as follows:

He that has the honor of approaching your Majesty has traveled extensively through Europe and has noticed that there is scarcely a city of secondary importance, even those that can hardly be called progressive, without a more or less extensive museum in which painters and sculptors can find models to copy, as well as an effective means for the furtherance of their studies, and for the completion of the same with honor for their persons and glory for their land. Why should a land replete with the elements necessary for the development of the fine arts lack this most powerful medium which can be acquired at so little cost?

Where would the money for such a museum come from? "Over 100,000 *duros* are held in the mercantile deposit of the Port of Manila, earmarked by its rules for the specific use of furthering commerce and education, and certainly nothing can be more useful and appropriate than the use of a part of these funds for the establishment of a museum from which so many advantages must result." Only 30,000 *duros* would be needed "for the acquisition of paintings, statues, models and drawings of every sort so as to form a small museum for the principal use of the School of Painting and Academy of Fine Arts there already established."

Not knowing what action to take, the royal court referred Roxas' petition to Manila where the tribunal recommended that it be disapproved inasmuch "as it was not time to start one"—perhaps later. The fact that Roxas was no longer a consul, and the other members replaced, might have been a reason for the negative action taken by the tribunal.

The choice of a suitable director for the new school was resolved—satisfactorily at the beginning—by discovering that a young Spaniard who had just arrived in the islands, destined for some bureaucratic job in the post office, possessed the attributes of a painting teacher. Enrique Nieto y Zamora was "a young man of excellent talent in painting," and he was forthwith named acting director at a hundred pesos a month (a good sum in those days) with Luis Pérez Domínguez and Nicolás Enríquez as assistants.

The tribunal of commerce approved thirteen regulations on November 12, 1849, to govern the new school, in part as follows: the lessons would be free to all students; Spaniards and Europeans would have to pay for paper, pencils, etc. used, but poor students and natives would be given these materials gratuitously; the teaching system at the Academia de San Fernando would be followed; classes would

be in the evenings, from 7 to 9; should the number of native applicants exceed 15, prospective students must be certified to by the *gobernadorcillo* and the parish priest; three consecutive absences from classes without a valid excuse would mean dismissal; students suffering from contagious diseases would not be allowed to enroll; dirty or unkempt students would not be allowed in the classes; and no corporal punishment would be permitted.

The artistic merits of Nieto apparently did not meet with universal approval, for a few years later, opposition to his permanent appointment developed. Certain residents prodded the *Junta de Comercio*, which had taken over control of the school from the tribunal, to hold a public exhibit of the best paintings of Nieto and that of the person of their choice—Manuel de la Cortina—to resolve the controversy. On November 22, 1852, the *Junta* ordered a hearing to determine the case, but in March of the following year Nieto suddenly resigned as acting director on "the grounds of illness." Perhaps his critics were right, or perhaps Nieto was so disgusted by the action of his detractors that he decided to quit, and used illness as a convenient way out.

The *Junta*, therefore, appointed Manuel de la Cortina acting director on July 5, 1853, on the grounds that he was the only one who had presented his candidacy for the post, and that "if he was not the only one at the time a consummate painter, still he did not lack the faculty of excellent artistic characteristics." To forestall criticism, the *Junta* added that some defects in the style of his painting on canvases would be corrected in due time. "Under this concept," the *Junta* concluded, "and in view of the fact that in these islands there is no other painter more suitable than Sr. Cortina, who has been acting satisfactorily in that position, this *Junta* confers on him the direction of the said school."

The need for paintings of great masters, proposed earlier by Mariano Roxas to serve as models for students, was soon felt by the new faculty: for on June 25, 1855, the *Junta* addressed a letter to the Queen asking for donations of some of the original canvases to be found at the royal palace in Madrid. Isabel's advisers, however, were against such a gift and suggested that copies could be made of well-known masterpieces; and the *Junta* therefore in August of that year appropriated the sum of 1,000 pesos for copies; but the court, knowing that even copies were expensive recommended that this sum be appropriated each year for some years, and in that way a sufficient number of models could be acquired.

Isidro Diaz de Arguelles, president of the *Real Academia de Nobles Artes*, recommended a list of the masterpieces to be copied, together with the names of the copyists—selected students who had "given proofs of their talent and industry"—and the price for each canvas, as follows:

Artist	Title	Copyist	Price in Reales Vellon
MURILLO	La Concepcion 7 x 4'	Antonio Torres	3,500
MURILLO	La Concepcion with cherubs	José Tolosa	600
MURILLO	La Sacra Familia, 5 x 6'	Carlos Maria Esquivel	1,000
MURILLO	Santiago Apostol, 4 x 10"	Juan Antonio Vera	3,500
MURILLO	San Francisco de Paula	Pablo Gordo	800
MURILLO	El Niño Dios	Alfredo Perea	600
RIVERA	Santo Tomás	Ventura Castelaro	500
RIVERA	Escala de Jacob	Agustín Saez	3,000
RIVERA	San Bartolome Apostol	Benito Mercado	500
ALONSO CANO	Virgen Adorando a su Hijo	Carlos Mujica	2,000
VELASQUEZ	Felipe IV joven traje cazador	Juan Earrueta	1,500
VELASQUEZ	Fernando de Austria	Eduardo Gimeno	1,500
TITIAN	Salome con cabeza de Juan Bautista	Carlos Loaraz	600
GUIDO RONI	Busto de un joven	Alejo Vera	400
Total			20,000

The selection of the canvases was made in consultation with Cortina, who had secured a leave of absence for eighteen months from the school on a half month's pay basis and presumably he brought back with him the copies when he returned in 1857. The above list is interesting to us today in giving us an insight into what Spanish academicians believed were proper canvases for Filipino student artists to emulate. The absence of other schools of painting from other countries speaks poorly of their choice, for did not the Prado Museum already have a good number of the masterpieces by Leonardo, Raphael, Van Dyck, Rembrandt and other European artists? Incidentally, one of the copyists was Agustín Saez, considered by the faculty at the Academy as one of their most promising students, for he was given the third highest paying canvas to paint; and many years later he would come to Manila as director of the school.

School records at this time reveal that a contest was held among students for the two best canvases, and the winners were a young Spaniard named Lorenzo Rocha who had drawn a life-like portrait of Queen Isabel II, and Lorenzo Guerrero, a native and sire of the great botanist León Ma. Guerrero, who had copied from the Biblioteca Colombiana in Seville its portrait of the famed explorer Fernando

de Magallanes. The prize of 300 pesos was equally divided between the two: The portraits were to be hung at the session hall of the *Junta*. Subsequently, some thirty years later, Rocha was to become director of the school where he had studied the first principles of the fine art.

The royal decree of March 9, 1891, unhappily incorporated the school of fine arts into the School of Arts and Trades, and leading citizens like former Mayor Jacobo Zobel Zangroniz protested ineffectively—for how could the painting of portraits and landscapes be placed in the same category as the painting of houses and furniture, sculpture on the same level as carpentry?

But the school continued its peripatetic existence, until it was replaced at the beginning of this century by the School of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines. For more than half a century it produced a notable group of Filipino painters, from Guerrero, Juan Arceo, José Lozano, Juan Nepomuceno and Simón Flores to Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo and Juan Luna Novicio who reaped honors for the country abroad.

CARLOS QUIRINO

Ecumenism: A Mission of Hope

Our everyday vocabulary is steadily enriched by a continuous flow of terms, some newly coined, others simply restored to circulation. One of the newest "ism's" to find its way into popular speech is "*ecumenism*". Actually this "ism" is a member of long-standing in the theological lexicon. Ecumenism includes all that pertains to the Christian population of the world as a whole; today, it refers especially to those activities and events designed to foster greater unity among the diverse elements of Christendom.¹

I have been asked to address you this morning on the subject of ecumenism. I do so with some apprehension for two reasons. In the first place, there is already a good deal of ecumenical activity in the Ateneo. This can mean that you probably know more about the subject than I can tell you in half an hour's talk.

In the second place, this is perhaps not the best time to talk about ecumenism. You are getting ready for the Civil Liberties Rally on Saturday, with its anti-Communist overtones. Now the spirit of such a rally is to fight—to fight for our rights, to fight against subversion.

¹ Cf. *First Steps in Grass-Roots Ecumenism*, National Council of Catholic Men, Washington, 1966, p. 57.