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**Tuklas Sining, edited by Tiongson**

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## Book Reviews



**Tuklas Sining: Essays on Philippine Art.** Edited by Nicanor G. Tiongson. Manila: Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas, 1991. 384 pages, illustrated.

In 1989, the Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas (Cultural Center of the Philippines) produced seven videos and accompanying monographs, collectively called *Tuklas Sining* and focusing on the arts of architecture, theater, music, literature, film, dance, and the visual arts. These videos demonstrated that the Filipino has much to crow about, and those who claimed that the Filipino had no culture did not know whereof they spoke. The monographs have now appeared in a handsome one-volume format. Seven hundred ten attractive photographs (color and black and white) and its hefty size (9" x 12") classify this book as belonging to the "coffee table book" format, as the invitation to its launching on 24 August 1991 styled it. But its pictures and text written by leading scholars (Rodrigo D. Perez III, Nicanor G. Tiongson, Antonio C. Hila, Doreen G. Fernandez, Bienvenido Lumbera, Basilio Esteban S. Villaruz, and Alice C. Guillermo) place it many rungs above the pretty picture book.

To many who have not kept up with the development of research on Philippine culture, *Tuklas Sining* will come as a pleasant surprise, a real discovery. To the specialist, however, much of the content of the monographs will be a succinct, though not necessarily new, exposition of the research on the arts. Then again, in the highly specialized world of academic research, the musicologist does not necessarily speak with the literary historian, the architectural researcher with the choreologist. The juxtaposition then of the seven essays creates synergy. The literary text contextualizes the visual, while the visual critiques the literary, the architectural interpenetrates the theatrical and so forth. The total impact then of the "coffee table" version of *Tuklas Sining* is to make an eloquent statement not about the arts in the Philippines but about *Philippine Art*, and by implication about Philippine culture. There are not one but three common threads that link all the arts: the Ethnic, the Hispanic, and the Anglo-American traditions. These traditions co-exist and interact as centers of power and creativity to produce the distinc-

tively Philippine arts. Thus, there is a timelessness to art in the Philippines. Instead of art growing from one movement to another in an ever-complex line of development, these traditions like different voices create a harmonious, though not monotonal, artistic melody.

Guided then by the triple tradition that undergirds Philippine art, the monographs trace the development of each art form not chronologically but within the context of a tradition around which the art revolves. Deliberately, *Tuklas Sining* has rejected the Western evolutionist perspective of art, which has served as blinders to perceiving Philippine art on its own terms. The iconoclasm continues: art forms include not only the traditional ones, literature, architecture, theater, etc. but also the upstart, film, a truly twentieth century art form. The traditional, though Europeo-centrist, distinction between art and craft (also artifacts, functional/applied arts) is debunked to allow room for such expressions as weaving, basketry, and popular forms like komiks. The term "visual arts" (which can include such diverse expressions as mat-weaving, metal casting, and easel painting) is preferred over the more restrictive painting and sculpture of the Western art historiography and criticism. In effect, *Tuklas Sining* is rewriting the miseducated Filipinos' myopic way of viewing art—a view colored by such Western biases as distinguishing between "legitimate" art and what is not.

Minds cleared of misconceptions, *Tuklas Sining* brings its readers through a therapeutic journey whereby their cultural amnesia is slowly healed. Crucial to this healing is the visual tapestry that unfolds from page to page. Woven into patterns of tropic colors and shades of sepia are reproductions, culled from now rare sources like the *National Geographic* 1913 issue featuring the peoples of the Philippines, and Neely F. Tennyson's *A Wonderful Reproduction of Living Scenes in Natural Color of America's New Possessions* (1901).

The photo research that went into the making of this book is impressive. Public and private sources were consulted. Among public sources examined are the National Library, American Historical Collection, Ayala Museum, Lopez Museum and Central Bank. Private collections consulted include the personal files of artists like Atang de la Rama, Basilio, Lucrecia Reyes-Urtula. Photo documentation tours were also undertaken by the CCP staff, resulting in the reproduction for the first time of Carlos "Botong" Francisco's *History of Manila* and complete views of Guillermo Tolentino's heroic *Bonifacio Monument*. The reproduction of Botong's mural is a publishing coup. This mural, which wraps around the Katipunan Hall of Manila's City Hall, is difficult to photograph as one whole. Thus previous reproductions have concentrated on details, in particular Rajah Sulayman's defiant figure. This reproduction of the whole mural does justice to the National Artist Botong. The reproduction also "saves" the mural, which is badly in need of cleaning and is fading in some spots. This masterpiece was almost lost to this generation when fire swept the hall sometime back.

We live in an age of electronic media, and thus the production of this coffee table book, which was preceded by videos, might seem to be a step backward. But is it? A book has its own merits. It does not need electricity, of which we are sorely lacking these days, to make it work. Books capture images and freeze them for contemplation. And that is what our arts demand—a moment of quiet with this treasure trove of a book to savor Filipinos at their best and most beautiful.

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**Exits and Entrances: Essays by Zeneida Amador.** Edited by Monina Mercado. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1991. xvi, 356 pages.

Although the name of Zeneida Amador is inseparable from theater, beyond the stage of Repertory Philippines, she is best known as a *Manila Bulletin* columnist. It is her latter capacity that the book *Exits and Entrances* presents. The title from Act II, Scene 7 of "As You Like It": "All the world's a stage / And all the men and women merely players: / They have their exits and entrances" is a finely chosen title for a volume that portrays vignettes from the point of view of a journalist who is a theater person herself.

Culled from the *Manila Bulletin*, the 238 essays in this collection were among those published between 1983 and 1991. They are neatly categorized into thirteen dominant themes: Work, Daily Life, Real People, Art, Children, Parenting, Personal Responsibility, Social Concerns, Elan, Being Filipino, Travel, Generosity of the Spirit, and Those Who Have Gone Ahead, which reveal the wide range of topics covered. The logic of sequencing the categories does not seem apparent, but this does not hinder the enjoyment one gets from reading the essays.

The regular followers of Amador's newspaper column will need virtually no preliminaries. Those reading the essays for the first time, however, will be set in the right mood by Teodoro Benigno's introduction, "Sips from a Literary Wineglass," itself a well crafted piece. Likening the experience of reading to that of looking through the eyes of a diamond expert, it describes Amador's talent and stimulates enthusiasm for the adventure of discovering at which angle a particular human drama tilts. Amador explicates, in the first essay, her reason for writing and being in theater: "Towards that well-ordered life to which art strives" (p. xvi).

Reading the essays, one goes through a process of listening and responding to insights and challenges embedded in them. In the area of work, Amador's favorite rallying cry is discipline, because "talent is not enough" (p. 15). Spartan this type of discipline may be, but it is not isolated from