

## **THE SPANISH COLONIAL TRADITION IN PHILIPPINE VISUAL ARTS**

The Spanish colonization of the Philippines from 1565 to 1898 brought about profound changes in the life and art of the Filipinos. Although some indigenous art forms survived, new forms and influences from Europe and America gradually became the dominant culture.

When Spanish missionaries embarked on their campaign to Christianize the Filipinos, they harnessed the visual arts to great effect. Using the colorful pageantry of the Roman Catholic Church, the new evangelists so enchanted the natives that they had little difficulty winning them over and instructing them in the new faith. Religion was thereafter to provide such great impetus for the visual arts that in virtually every art form the sacred aspect became far more developed than the secular, thus continuing the intimate relationship between art and religion long established in ancient Filipino belief systems.

However, while the colonizers were Spanish, a significant portion of artistic influences was not. The Chinese arrived in greater numbers from southeastern China to offer goods for the galleon trade and to sell services in the city of Manila. But there were periods when the Chinese would be expelled by the Spaniards from the colony in the mutual love-hate relationship between the two races. Filipinos benefited from this situation by mastering the Chinese skills so useful to the colonizers and practicing them when the Chinese were absent.

With the galleon also came the Mexicans, whose cultural influence on the Filipinos, and vice versa, has until now received scant attention from scholars.

Together, Portuguese, Italian, and even Bohemian priests evangelized with other missionaries. In the 19th century, English, French, American, German, and other nationalities also settled in Manila, further enriching the cultural milieu.

Rituals and processions were the first visual aids. From the technologies used in crafting ritual paraphernalia developed the various visual art forms which characterized the Spanish colonial period: sculpture, painting, printmaking, furniture, fine metalwork, metal casting, textile arts, and fiesta decor.

### **Sculpture**

Of all the arts, sculpture was the most familiar to the Filipinos. The carving of anito, images of the native religion, was replaced by the carving of santos, images of Christ and the saints. Technically, the transition may not have been too difficult, as the Filipinos were already familiar with the ways of wood, but adjustments had to be made on proportion and style. In time, santos took on the iconography of their Western prototypes.

Santos commissioned by the church were usually large, carved from hardwood such as molave, and placed on church facades or altars. The houses of the rich often displayed santos like those in the church. Small santos were kept in miniature altar pieces with niches called *urnas* while others were protected under cylindrical glass globes called *virinas*. It was the santos of the ordinary folk, however, which displayed a variety of innovations. Many were carved by their owners who ignored Western rules on anatomy and proportion in favor of their own personal preferences. Every so often santos harked back to earlier carving traditions: they sported large heads which recall the description of anitos in early 16th-century Cebu (Pigafetta 1969:42).

To make santos appear more lifelike, they were finished in the process called *encarnacion*. Here, a coating of gesso, a mixture similar to plaster of paris, was first applied all over the wood to cover cracks and smoothen the surface on which flesh-colored paint was later applied. Lifelike qualities were enhanced by the application of glass eyes and tears, and wigs of human or fiber hair. If a statue was carved with drapery, these were polychromed or painted in various colors. Intricate floral designs were often painted on the gowns. Gold-leaf decoration was also applied.

Apart from carving whole statues of wood, artists crafted mannequins with wooden heads and hands which were attached to a *bastidor* or framework body. These *bastidor* santos were outfitted with gowns of expensive material, elaborately embroidered with gold thread and sequins. Made chiefly for processions, they were mounted on men's shoulders or on carriages and brought around town. After the procession the santos were returned to the church or to the houses of their *camareros* or caretakers, where they were usually kept in huge glass cabinets until the next procession. So much was needed for the maintenance of the santos that earnings from ricefields and other properties were specially set aside for their upkeep.

Ivory santos deserve special mention. Although the presence of elephants was recorded in Sulu up to the end of the 16th century, ivory was for the most part imported from countries, such as Mozambique, India, and Vietnam. Substitutes for ivory were fishbone and the teeth of the *duyong* or sea cow. The ivory-carving trade was first assigned to the Chinese, who had in fact begun carving Christian ivory statues in their home country. As 17th-century Philippine ivory santos may be seen today in numbers in Mexico and Spain, it may be surmised that the early images were created mainly for export.

Some scholars have proposed that, in view of the absences of Chinese artists from our shores, the Filipinos themselves must have carved great numbers of these ivory santos. The Filipinos learned carving skills from the Chinese. Under the influence of these teachers, they carved in the Chinese manner, creating flat oval faces with heavy eyelids. The slight curve found in many statues was due to the natural curve of the elephant's tusk. This posture became so popular that even

santos carved from large blocks of wood were given a similar curve. Another peculiar feature of Philippine ivory carving may be seen on the backs of many 17th-century images of the Virgin Mary: a *suksok* or tuck at the back of the robes.

Santos could also be made of stone, but this material was not as popular as wood. Stone santos seem to have been made exclusively for the church, and most often for their exteriors. Most do not display sophisticated modelling and detail, although the examples in Tumauni, Isabela and in San Joaquin, Iloilo suggest a more proficient hand.

In the 19th-century miniature tableaux depicting religious scenes became popular. Santos carved in wood or ivory, and clothed in gold, silver, or expensive threads were placed amidst luxuriant settings with blown-glass flora and fauna. The landscape was made luminous with the iridescent wings of the *salaginto* or beetle.

Aside from free-standing images, religious scenes were also carved in relief. Known as *relieves*, these ranged in size from small plaques hung in houses to the large and heavy ones used to adorn churches. A series of these panels was fitted into altar pieces. As *Via Crucis* or Stations of the Cross, they were hung in sequence along the church walls to illustrate the passion and death of Christ on Calvary.

After three centuries of religious sculptures, images other than santos were carved. In the second half of the 19th century, the increasing number of businessmen travelling to the Philippines created a market for souvenirs. Particularly popular were the *tipos del pais*, figures of ordinary people in local costume. When the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura began to include sculpture in its classes in 1879, students began to carve not only tipos del pais but also heads of various Philippine ethnographic types, and genre or scenes from everyday life.

Aside from santos and relieves, the Filipinos carved ornaments to embellish the interiors and exteriors of churches, houses, and other buildings. The grandest achievements in this manner are the retablos or altarpieces, the focal point inside churches. The earliest retablo is that found in San Agustin Church in Intramuros, said to have been carved in 1617 by Juan de los Santos, a native of San Pablo, Laguna. This altar piece reflects 16th-century Spanish influences, notably in the orderly rows of niches for santos, the strong vertical movement, and the use of ornate motifs reminiscent of the plateresque style, so called because of its resemblance to the intricate silverwork of that era.

Later retablos showed baroque influences, albeit modified to native preferences. Altarpieces became wider, providing a strong horizontal movement to balance the vertical upward thrust. Flamboyant and swirling vegetal forms and the twisted salomonic column, based on the pillars believed to have been used in King Solomon's temple, were characteristics of these decorations.

In the second half of the 18th century, Rococo motifs began to be adopted. The most popular one was the *rocaille* or ornamentation characterized by asymmetric, jagged lines—which at times resemble rock or coral-like forms, at other times resemble tongues of fire. However, the retablo with orderly rows of niches, as exemplified by the retablo of San Agustin, was replicated all over the Islands, with only the decorations varying.

Tastes began to change in the 19th century when retablos became more formal and architectural, with very restrained carved decorations. An interesting development may be seen in the Ilocos and a few other regions where retablos of stone and mortar, not of wood, were constructed. Later in the century, a few altar pieces reflected the vogue for gothic revival, manifesting spires and pointed arches.

The Filipinos' mastery of wood carving was reflected not only on retablos but also on such other religious furnishings as pulpits, doors, choir screens, and *carrozas* or processional carriages. The era's last burst of grandeur was achieved by Isabelo Tampinco, who carved the *artesonado* or coffered ceilings of San Ignacio Church in Intramuros, inaugurated in 1890.

Carved facades reflect another aspect of Filipino artistry. Stone cutters worked on adobe, coral stone, volcanic rock, and stucco to delineate figures of saints, floral decorations, and architectural elements. The facade of the church in Miag-ao, Iloilo is a joyful adaptation of classical and rococo motifs. Its pediment highlights San Cristobal dressed in native costume carrying the Christ Child on his shoulder. He clutches a coconut tree and is flanked by guava and palm trees. On the other hand, the facade of the church of Morong, Rizal, carved by Bartolome Palatino of Paete, Laguna, is an exuberant compendium of virtually every classical architectural component and motif. In a lighter vein, the carver's proclivities were expressed in such household items as wooden molds used for making the biscuits to be given away on the feast of San Nicolas de Tolentino. Touches of the carver's art may also be seen in other domestic utensils like coconut graters, clothes presses, and *sungka* game boards.

## **Painting**

For much of Spanish rule, religious icons were the prevalent form of painting. Paintings of saints and religious scenes were constantly commissioned for churches, conventos or residences of parish priests, monasteries, schools, chapels, and private residences. Although the bulk of the paintings was created for churches and buildings, they could also be found in lowly nipa huts.

The earliest extant religious paintings are the late 16th-century frescoes in the monastery of San Agustin in Intramuros. The paintings on the stone walls of the sacristy are in abstract, strapwork patterns. The frescoes on the stone ceiling of the refectory, probably of a later date, are more floral and depict the initials of

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Since paintings from Europe and America were understandably scarce, the religious orders took it upon themselves to teach basic artistic skills to their parishioners. As the *sangleyes* or Chinese immigrants knew how to paint, it was easy for them to learn Western techniques and to imitate what few paintings the friars brought with them from Mexico and Spain. This skill was eventually learned by Filipinos who in effect inherited Chinese and Spanish techniques. Using the Chinese brush, Filipinos began painting exceedingly fine details. They copied from Spanish models, but since black and white engravings of saints were often the only material from which to gain inspiration, the native artists developed their own color scheme of bright, primary hues.

Religious imagery tended to be more byzantine than baroque in feeling. The subjects were depicted frontally, usually in static postures. A multipoint perspective was used, which made a scene appear to be viewed from above. The size of the personages increased according to their importance in the painting. Christ in a Crucifixion scene, for example, would dwarf the Roman soldiers.

Paintings of nonreligious subjects became popular in the 19th century, although secular scenes had already appeared in engravings in the 1730s. Paintings were also used for propaganda purposes, as when a series of paintings was commissioned in 1821 to commemorate the victory of Spanish forces over the Ilocano in the Basi Revolt. The artist was Esteban Villanueva from Vigan, Ilocos Sur.

As travel to and from the island became easier, a demand for tourist souvenirs arose. Like their counterparts in sculpture, the *tipos del pais* were much sought after. Albums showing different native types in their characteristic costumes were painted by various artists. The most popular of these were the series by Damian Domingo, one of the most famous artists of the 19th century.

Art portraiture gained importance by the beginning of the 19th century, with the rise in fortune of the mestizo and native elite. These new wealthy classes, wishing to document their affluence, commissioned artists to paint their likenesses in all their finery and luxurious details were not to be missed: their delicate *piña embroidery*, the luster of their pearl-encrusted combs, and the glow of their gold *tamborin* (big round beads). Portraits were also painted on locketts and kept as souvenirs of loved ones. Portraits in the style of *miniaturismo*, depicting minute details on large canvases, remained popular until the end of the 19th century. Some of the more important portraitists of the previous century were Juan Arceo, Severino Flavier Pablo, Antonio Malantic, Justiniano Asuncion, and Simon Flores.

One form of miniaturist painting, which depicted not the likeness of the sitter but his name, is known as *letras y figuras* (letters and figures). In this form, the letters of the patron's name, upon close scrutiny, is discovered to be the result of clever

figurations of people engaged in everyday activities. The most famous practitioner of *letras y figuras* was Jose Honorato Lozano.

The first formal art school in the country, the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura, established in 1823, was headed by Damian Domingo. Closed in 1834, the Academia opened again in 1850, this time with professors from Spain. The tendency in the Academia was to turn away from *miniaturismo* and emphasize painting through brushwork. Single-point perspective was introduced wherein a subject was seen from only one point of view. This style, later termed the “academic,” was gradually favored by the church and the government. Artists commissioned by churches painted icons in this style, but continued to portray their sitter in the *miniaturist* style, which was preferred by the middle class.

Under the influence of the Academia, other forms of painting such as everyday scenes, landscapes, and *bodegones* (still lifes) became popular. Among the artists who distinguished themselves in these forms were Simon Flores, Lorenzo Guerrero, Felipe Roxas, Felix Martinez, and Paz Paterno.

A small number of artists was given the chance to pursue studies in Europe. However, since much of their work was done abroad, they did not exert any influence on contemporary Filipino art until the early days of the 20th century. The two most important artists in this group were Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo. At their best in genre and landscape, they also painted historical canvases like the rest of the European academics at the time. The two became the first Filipino artists to gain artistic fame abroad when their paintings won top prizes at the 1884 *Exposicion Nacional de Bellas Artes* in Madrid. Luna received a gold medal for his *Spoliarium*, and Hidalgo a silver for his *Las virgenes cristianas expuestas al populacho* (Christian Virgins Exposed to the Populace).

## **Print**

Up to the 18th century there were only four printing presses, all located in Manila. The oldest method of printmaking was xylography or woodcut printing, which involved cutting the reverse of an image on a plaque of wood. The first book printed in the country, *Doctrina christiana en lengua española y tagala* (Christian Doctrine in the Spanish and Tagalog Languages), 1593, featured a woodcut engraving of Santo Domingo de Guzman done by the Chinese convert Juan de Vera. Printing from woodcuts was a popular practice until the 18th century, when copper-plate engraving became more widely used. In this method, the reverse image was etched in acid on a copper plate.

All presses were owned by the religious orders; hence most works printed were either religious treatises or prayer books. The *estampas* or prints appearing in these publications featured portraits of saints and religious scenes, like the

Crucifixion; smaller *estampitas* were also distributed to the townsfolk during feast days. Many of these were later embroidered, framed, and hung on walls.

The 18th century may be said to be the golden age of Philippine printmaking. The fact that Filipino printmakers then signed their works, and affixed “Indus Manil,” “Indio Tagalo,” even “Indio Filipino,” implies confidence in both their art and ethnic identity. The most important engravers of this period were Francisco Suarez, Nicolas de la Cruz Bagay, Lorenzo Atlas (previously identified as Laureano but with recent evidence seems to be Laurentsius in Latin or Lorenzo in Spanish), and Felipe Sevilla. Suarez and Bagay depicted Philippine scenes and flora and fauna on the first complete map of the Philippines done by Filipinos in 1734. In 1760 the two also illustrated the fifth edition of what is regarded as the first *pasyon*, written by Gaspar Aquino de Belen. Atlas is known for his prints of religious images and scenes, as well as for one of the earlier known portraits, that of Bishop Juan Angel Rodriguez.

Copper-plate engraving continued up to the 19th century, although by then it had lost much of its vigor. Eventually, it was displaced by the new technology of lithography, a process in which a greasy medium is used to delineate the image on a flat stone and was crucial to the advancement of newspapers and periodicals. The magazines *La Ilustracion Filipina*, 1859-1860, and *La Ilustracion del Oriente*, 1877-1878, featured beautiful lithographs. Apparently the most ambitious project using lithography was the printing of the plates of Father Manuel Blanco’s *Flora de Filipinas* (Plants of the Philippines) in 1878. Filipinos did not develop lithography as efficiently as they did engraving. Most lithographers during the Spanish period appeared to have been Spaniards and other foreigners. Blanco’s Flora in 1878 had designs made by Filipinos, but with color lithography done in Spain.

## **Furniture**

Filipinos, especially members of the elite, gradually emulated the lifestyle introduced by the Spaniards. In native homes the furniture resembled those used in churches, conventos, and the houses of Spaniards. Furniture during this period may be roughly classified into three, according to function: pieces for storing things in, pieces for resting on, and pieces for laying things on.

One of the earliest pieces for storage was the *baul*, a wooden chest. Locally made baul reproduced in carvings the intricate markings of tooled Cordovan leather, which was used to cover chests brought in by the galleons. The *aparador* was a large cabinet which had one, two, or even three doors. Huge aparadores stood in church sacristies for storing various utensils and silver ornaments. Smaller aparadores were found in residences, often in the bedrooms. In the 19th century, as fortunes rose, aparadores began to sport large mirrors on their doors and elaborate carvings on the crown.

An upright chest with two or more drawers was called a *comoda*, where such things as table linens and small articles were kept. Church sacristies used elongated and bulky chests of drawers called *cajoneras*, for altar cloths and elaborate priests' vestments. The tops of these *cajoneras* were wide and polished, so that the priest could lay out his chasuble and other accessories as he prepares for mass.

In virtually every home, one *comoda* was reserved as the family altar for household santos. Today this piece of furniture is popularly called the *mesa altar* (altar table), although this is a misnomer as it is a cross between a table and a *comoda*. It usually has two to three large drawers supported on four legs reinforced by a stretcher. Some *mesa altar* also incorporate long slender drawers for storing candles.

In the bedroom was the *painadora*, a dresser or chest of small and large drawers surmounted by a mirror. A more elaborate form of the *painadora* was the *tremor* which features three full-length mirrors, two of which can be adjusted so that the woman could see herself from three angles. Also found in the bedroom was the *almario*, an interesting example of Filipino adaptation of Spanish imports. Originally used in Spain as a cabinet for weapons and called *armario*, in the Philippines it referred to a tall, slender, four-posted bedroom rack which stored pillows, mosquito nets, rolled-up mats and other beddings.

At one end of the dining room was at least one *platera*, a cabinet which displayed the family's porcelain and silver tableware. In the kitchen, food was stored in the *pamingalan*, a cupboard with shelves and drawers, usually protected by two slatted doors. Finally, hat and cane racks, usually with mirrors, were placed at the entrances to living rooms for the convenience of residents and guests.

Furniture in the second category were made up of pieces used for resting on, such as chairs and benches, sofas and beds. Chairs came in a variety of forms. The so-called bishops' chairs were heavy and elaborately carved, and were located by the main altar of a church for the priest and his assistants. The *frailero* was so named because it was supposed to be wide enough to accommodate a portly friar. The term came from Spain itself, an indication that even there the cliché of the fattened cleric was a popular one. The seats and backs of chairs were often of *solihya* or open rattan fretwork.

Evocative of the tropics was the *butaca* (planter's chair). Its most prominent features were a reclining back and long wide arms which often extended way beyond the front of the seat. This chair, also called *silla perezosa* (lazy chair), was the epitome of relaxation in those days; the sitter could rest his legs up on the long wide arms as he took his afternoon siesta.

Benches, known as *bancos* or *kapiyas*, were kept on the ground level of the house



for visitors and tenants to rest on while waiting to be called upstairs. A popular bench was the *gallinera*, so called because the slatted bottom half was supposed to keep roosters while their owners carried on their business with residents of the house. Intricately carved benches were also used in churches. There were no pews then as they are known today. Most of the congregation knelt or stood, following the liturgy. Only the principal citizens were allowed the privilege of sitting on the long benches which were placed along the middle of the nave.

Towards the end of the 19th century many living rooms had a sofa popularly known as the *mariposa*, named after the butterfly shape of its back and derived from the Victorian horsehair sofa. Like chairs, beds were an innovation in the Filipino lifestyle. Unlike Western beds, Filipino beds had sleeping surfaces of woven *solihya*, ensuring coolness and comfort for the occupant. Beds were often of the four-poster variety which was convenient for hanging mosquito nets. In the late 19th century, the more popular four-posters with abundant floral and vegetal motifs were crafted by a Chinese in Binondo, Eduardo Ah Tay.

The third category was furniture for laying things on. The most important in this group were the tables, among which the dining table was the most noteworthy. Traditionally, Filipinos ate while squatting around the *dulang*, a very low table. Gradually, Filipinos particularly the upper class, adopted the higher *mesa* (table) with matching chairs. Tables for large families were often constructed from wide elongated panels of wood which could seat up to 36 people. Side tables were known as *consolas*. *Escritorios* (office tables) were outfitted with folding or roll-up desk tops to store paper and other writing materials. In the bedroom were *lavaderas* or tables provided with porcelain wash basins for morning ablutions. Tables were made of wood or marble.

Philippine furniture absorbed artistic influences from the different peoples trading with the islands. Many 17th-century pieces manifest touches of Chinese design in the use of dragon heads and ball-and-claw on the feet of tables, chests, and benches. Some pieces are known to have been inlaid with mother-of-pearl, such as the present to the Viceroy of Peru. Later 18th-century pieces, especially some *mesas altares*, exhibit modified and flattened *rocaille* motifs, reminiscent of *rococo*. In the 19th century, as trade with England and the United States increased, furniture design began to show influences from French Louis XV to English Victorian styles. The inlaying of furniture with bone had by this time become a specialty of the provinces of Bulacan and Nueva Ecija. At the turn of the century, neogothic pointed arches appeared on such items as door panels for cabinets. **Fine Metalwork**

Early Spanish chronicles may have differed in their observations of Filipino customs, but all were unanimous in noting the Filipino love for jewelry. Jewelry making, and goldsmithing in particular, was an ancient practice in the country. Proof of this comes from archaeological excavations all over the country and from 17th-century Tagalog dictionaries containing a wealth of terms related to the art of goldsmithing, such as techniques, weights and measures, and types of jewelry.

One indigenous jewelry technique which flourished during the colonial era was granulation. Minute beads of gold were applied on flat surfaces to form designs, or were soldered together to form larger beads for *alukon* chains which resembled a vine of that name. Other popular types of gold chains were finely wrought *bejuquillo*, known since the 16th century; the double-linked flat *alpahor*, which resembles a Spanish pastry; the *San Felipe*, an *alpahor* variant mixed with beads; and the *tornasol*, which was made of double interlinked cut sheets.

Very early in their conversion, Filipinos, upon the encouragement of the friars, developed the habit of wearing rosaries and crucifixes around their necks. The habit gave rise to the finest jewelry for personal devotions. The *relicario*, also called *agnos*, was a necklace from which dangled a pendant encasing a religious relic. Another popular name for this necklace was *tamborin*, perhaps because the shape of its pendant resembled a *tambor* (embroiderer's hoop) or maybe because a kind of frame similar in shape to a tambor was needed to guide the needlelike instruments in twirling the fine gold wire. The *tamborin* referred as well to filigreed beads used for rosaries. The *escapulario* or *kalmin* was a scapular, a pair of medals worn on the breast and the back. Some escapularios and cross pendants are noteworthy for their intricate, lacelike patterns, incorporating motifs akin to the rococo. A few rare examples resemble thorns or pineapple leaves; hence the term *tinik* (thorn) or *piña* or pineapple. Gold crosses incorporated a variety of materials: tortoise shell, red coral, ivory, and mother-of-pearl.

Not everyone, of course, could afford expensive religious jewelry. The common people developed the tradition of wearing medals with abbreviated Latin inscriptions and relief representations of religious personalities, ranging from the eye of God to San Cristobal. These *anting-anting* (amulets) acquired different forms and various "powers." They were said to render the wearer invisible, safe from evil, irresistible to women or immune to bullets. Other amulets eventually took the form of double crucifixes; dwarves; and even animals, such as the crocodile.

With the advent of the galleon trade, silver began to pour in from Mexico and the Chinese started to settle in Manila. Used to working only with solid gold, the Filipinos learned the techniques of silverwork and gilding introduced by the Chinese.

As the affluence of Chinese mestizos grew, so did their collection of jewelry. By the 19th century a variety of personal items were being crafted in gold and silver. The upper-class woman nestled a *peineta* (comb) in her hair or used a *pantoche* (pin) to hold her veil in place. From her ears hung *criollas* or *aretas* (hoop earrings), and around her neck was a *gargantilla* (choker). Her *pañuelo* (shoulder scarf) was pinned together by an *alfiler* (brooch). She wore any number of *anillos* (rings) on her fingers, and *pulseras* (bracelets) on her wrists. From one wrist dangled the *porta abanico* (fan chain), which kept a fan conveniently near. Tucked into the skirt waist

was a *llavero* (keyholder)—more keys meant more doors and more chests to open, indicating affluence. Even the *colchos* (slippers) were adorned with silver decorations, and the *salakot* or headgear studded with silver ornaments. Silver and gold glinted from the *baston* (walking stick) and the *cairel* (watch chain) of the upper-class gentleman.

Already adept at making jewelry, the goldsmith gradually learned to fashion religious vessels for church use. Chalice and patens, *ciboria*, monstrances, and other ecclesiastical accessories commonly used silver said to have been melted from Mexican coins. The *naveta* was a boat-shaped container for the *kamanyang* or native incense, which was sprinkled into the coals of the *incensario* or censer, for incensing altars and other objects on special occasions.

There were the *candeleros* (candlestands) in various shapes and sizes, and *ramilletes* (stylized bouquets) to decorate altars. The *lampara* was a huge lamp suspended by chains from the ceiling, which contained the oil for the sanctuary lamp. Silver sheet—chased, hammered, and brightly polished—were mounted on wooden frames to form crosses, tabernacles, *guiones* (processional standards), altar *frontales* or flats and panels for the *carrozas* or processional floats.

Patron saints of churches were adorned with gold and silver, usually in the form of *coronas* (crowns) and *aureolas* (haloes). Around the face of the Virgin Mary fitted a *rostrillo* (facial aureole), while the head of Christ featured three *potencias* or rays signifying the three mental faculties. A near-endless variety of saints' personal symbols and accessories were also crafted in silver, including angel wings, boots, staves, miters, quills, palm leaves, and crowns. Silver *ex-votos* or tokens in the shape of eyes, noses, lips, limbs, and others were given by devotees to special *santos* in gratitude for favors granted. This custom continues to this day, decking out the image of Santa Lucia in the town bearing her name in Ilocos Sur. A triumph of the silversmith's craft is the elaborately wrought image of San Diego de Alcantara in the church of Nagcarlan, Laguna.

Although the church claimed a large portion of silver for its liturgy, there was enough silver left for domestic purposes. Silver was used for separate trays for *buyo* and tobacco leaves, both used for chewing betel nut. There were also silver chests, mosquito net holders, perfume burners, and tableware. But perhaps the most flamboyant of these pieces were the *paliteras* or toothpick trees fashioned into pineapples, dogs, peacocks, and other fanciful shapes.

## **Metal Casting**

The art of metal casting was practiced in foundries, the earliest of which were those found in Intramuros and the port of Cavite. Apart from such metal hardware as muskets, cannons, and galleon fittings, numerous bells were cast to supply the great number of churches rising all over the islands. The oldest known

bell in the country, dated 1595 and found in Camalaniugan, Cagayan, displays an archaic form which is more cylindrical than conical. By the end of the 18th century, however, bells had taken on the form familiar today.

There were at least four kinds of bells. The large *campana* was hung from a beam and was rung by pulling the clapper against the mouth of the bell. The slightly smaller *esquilla* was rotated, propelled by a heavy wooden yoke attached to the bell's head which acted as a counterweight. The *campanilla* (handbell) was rung by an assistant during consecration and other rituals. A series of small bells attached to a *rueda* (wheel), was heard on festive occasions like Easter and Christmas.

In the 19th century, bell casters began affixing their names on their products. Benito de los Reyes was a bell caster active in the first part of that century. The most prolific was Hilario Sunico, whose foundry began operations in San Nicolas in Manila in 1870. Juan Reina was Sunico's counterpart in Iloilo; he cast what is regarded as the country's largest bell in 1878 for the church of Panay in Capiz.

Once in a while, metal casters also produced statues. The most famous of these is that of King Charles IV of Spain, whose statue was cast in 1824 in gratitude for his introduction of a vaccine in the islands in 1805. This statue, now standing again in its original place in front of the Manila Cathedral, was cast by Ambrosio Casas, a Chinese mestizo whose daughter married Damian Domingo, the painter.

As in Spain and Latin America, iron grills were cast and used in buildings and homes to secure windows and other openings. However, early examples of grillwork are exceedingly rare because, together with bells, many were melted down in the turbulent 17th and 18th centuries and recast as cannons and other much-needed weapons. The most popular type of grill used for windows is the *rejas na buntis* (pregnant grill) which had a convex curve at the lower half of its form. Finely worked grill doors dated 1866 may be seen in San Agustin Church in Intramuros.

The foundry of Hilarion Sunico in San Nicolas, Manila, famous for its bells, also crafted iron grills, such as the fanciful ones for the San Ignacio Church in Intramuros done before 1890.

## **Textile Art**

During the Spanish colonial period, the local fabric which caught the imagination of the Spaniards and other foreigners was the *nipis*. In the 17th century, the Visayans were described as wearing *nipis* which was woven from stalks of the abaca plant, a cousin of the banana. Later the term *nipis* came to refer to fabrics made from niaguey leaves, jusi or raw silk, and the most famous of all, *piña* or pineapple leaves. *Nipis* fabrics were colorfully dyed, striped, or embroidered in

white, and made into *camisa* or shirts for male and female, *pañuelos* or shoulder scarves, *panyo* or handkerchiefs, altar cloths and articles for religious functions.

Being a favorite souvenir of foreigners, *nipis* was introduced to the international market in the late 19th century and captivated Europe and America. Many beautiful pieces of *nipis* are found in museums and private collections abroad from New York to London and Switzerland.

*Nipis* fabrics were decorated in a number of ways. Stripes and checkerboard patterns were achieved by introducing supplementary threads while weaving at the loom in a technique called *sinuksok*. Drawnwork or *calado*, achieved by pulling threads to make small perforations, resembled lace. The *calado*, combined with embroidery, became more popular in late 19th-century Europe as “Manila lace.” The *sombrado* technique was achieved by stitching floral patterns cut from white cotton cloth on the reverse side of the transparent fabrics, creating a shadow effect.

These techniques were passed from generation to generation. They were also taught in schools for girls in large towns all over the country. The embroidery work of these students, involving the use of variously colored cotton threads, as well as gold and silver threads and spangles, was extensively used for priests’ vestments, *santos*’ robes, and altar cloths.

## **Fiesta Decor**

An appreciation of Filipino colonial art is incomplete without the mention of the decorations created specially for fiestas of patron saints. Typically, most of these are short-lived, created for the specific occasion or for a short period of time.

A town celebrating its patron saint’s feastday or some other festive occasion, for instance, marks its entrance and its main thoroughfares with bamboo *arcos* (arches) embellished with palm fronds, paper ornaments, *pakaskas* (whittled poles), and intertwined branches. Paper and cloth buntings, called *banderitas* or *banderillas*, are strung along poles, trees, and houses. The festive air is enhanced by large papier mache figures called *higantes*, propped up and paraded around town by men hidden inside their hollow structures.

For the feast of San Isidro, patron saint of farmers, facades of residences in the towns of Lucban and Sariaya in Quezon province are festooned with *kiping* which are thin, colorful, translucent rice wafers shaped like leaves, as well as with vegetables and the other produce of the home owner’s trade. On the feast of San Nicolas de Tolentino cookies and biscuits bearing the likeness of the saint are given away. This custom, introduced by the Augustinians, recalls the saint’s deliverance from sickness with bread given by the Virgin Mary. The women of San Miguel de Mayumo, Bulacan wrap their special *pastillas* or carabao milk

confections in sheets of *papel de hapon* (Japanese paper) of many colors, with “tails” cut out into intricate lacelike designs of flowers, fruits, greetings, and even women playing harps.

In colonial times the *parol* (lanterns) were brought out during processions to ask deliverance from pestilence or drought. This custom has virtually been lost except in a few towns in the Bicol region. However, the decorative and symbolic role of the parol as the Star of Bethlehem during Christmas has survived to this day and has evolved into many imaginative forms using all kinds of materials. The traditional parol was made of colorful translucent papel de hapon glued with rice paste on a light bamboo frame. It was shaped like a five-pointed star and endowed with “tails,” like a comet, also of papel de hapon.

The season of Lent ushered in its own set of art forms. The mood was decidedly theatrical, centering on the re-enactment of Christ’s passion. For the liturgy of Palm Sunday, parishioners waved elaborately plaited palm fronds called *palaspas*, while the priest led a procession recalling Christ’s entry into Jerusalem. The Good Friday observance in Paete, Laguna is highlighted by the presentation of Christ’s suffering and death through a procession of mechanical santos. But the most remarkable Lenten play is that held in various towns on the island of Marinduque. Popularly known as *moriones*, the play is still presented every Holy Week and features participants wearing painted wooden or papier mache masks. Easily the most imaginative masks are those representing Roman centurions.

The fiesta synthesizes in countless ways the legacy of the Spanish colonial period to Filipino art. The grand procession of the fiesta is at once a veritable catalogue of the Filipino’s artistic skills; the santo, chiselled by the wood-carver; the vestments, sequined by the embroiderer; the carroza, created by the furniture maker; the silver fittings, hammered by the silversmith; the panels, decorated by the painter; the prayerbooks, engraved by the printmaker; the masks of gigantes, molded by the papier mache artist; and the bells and candlesticks, cast by a metalsmith. This is perhaps appropriate because, among other reasons, it was the conquest of souls which the Spaniards say brought them to Philippine shores. •  
R.T. Jose

## Reference

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