

Tata Simon's Legacy



On October 28 this year, Caviteño artist Simon Saulog would have celebrated his 100th birthday. To honor the late master, his students (members of Imus-based Malayang Sining—now a “technically defunct” socio-civic organization of artists who get together from time to time) culled together six of the master’s obras in oil and other media, and pooled them with their own works for the exhibit “Tata Simon: Simon Saulog: The Master and His Legacy” at Museo De La Salle’s Fe Panlilio Gallery, October 19-December 10.

Says Angelo Aguinaldo, a devoted student of Saulog (and “yet-to-be-unseated” president of Malayang Sining), there has been a resurgence of interest in Saulog’s works recently. For instance, reportedly, a Saulog painting fetched around P350,000 at Leon Gallery. Online, Saulog has also been “creating a lot of noise.”

“Filipinos [based in Florida, USA] are asking for a catalogue of the exhibit... A lot of collectors are now curious about him, about the artworks.”

“The artworks are intact,” adds Aguinaldo, “but they are dispersed.” Besides private collections, among places one can find Saulog paintings are the National Museum (Manila), Makati Medical Center, Far Eastern University, UP Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Center, and Manila Polo Club.

Owing to his pioneering eminence, Saulog is to Cavite as Botong is to Angono. The son of a horse trader, Saulog was born in Malagasang, Imus in 1916, growing up sketching his father’s horses. Recognizing the artistic talent of the boy, his father encouraged him, sending him to University of the Philippines to learn more about art and painting in 1931. Among his mentors were the Amorsolo brothers (Fernando and Pablo), Fabian dela Rosa and Candido Alcantara who described him as “a painter at heart.”

In honor of his favorite mentor Pablo Amorsolo, Saulog joined the AAP (Art Association of the Philippines), and won various painting competitions thereafter. Among his winning works were “Hope” (2nd Prize, FEU Art

Exhibition), “Parting Kiss” (Honorable Mention in the AAP’s 4th Annual Art Exhibition and 1st Prize in 1956 in New Delhi, India), “Madonna of the Sampaguita” (2nd Place for the Purchase Prize during 11th Annual Art Exhibition of 1958), and his most celebrated “Offspring” (2nd Prize in the 1952 AAP Art Exhibition), featured on the cover of Mobil Ways Magazine in 1955 and now in the collection of the country’s National Museum.

It is not surprising that, given his mentors and their tutelage, Saulog espoused “traditional” painting, in the footsteps of Fernando Amorsolo and European academic painting. The colors are very Amorsolo, “but the themes are somewhat different because they were actually very close to his heart,” says Aguinaldo.

Frequent themes involved women, modeled by his one of his in-laws, his daughters, granddaughters, neighbors—“women of the countryside [with] unspoiled, fragile purity....”

to page 2

Typical of the classical style, some of the exhibited works are steeped in symbolism (e.g. "Maria Makiling," "Baclaran Scene," "Basag ng Banga," etc.) and, as such, have stories to tell. "That's one thing Saulog was always telling us," says Aguinaldo. "Make a story.' A picture should speak a thousand words."

For his traditional approach and popularity with foreign art buyers, Saulog was identified with the "Mabini Artists"—those whose artistic inclinations were "traditional" and appealed mostly to tourists who frequented Mabini Street starting the post-war years and bought their artworks on demand and by bulk. This practice was frowned upon and later derided by the "modernists" whose influence started to dominate the local art scene in the latter half of the 20th century.

"When Anita Magsaysay-Ho went to the US, she came back with a new style—the cube style," related Aguinaldo. "[Before this], she lost to Saulog in one contest. Anita made a promise, albeit jokingly, to Saulog: 'Pagbalik ko, tatalunin kita (When I come back, I shall defeat you)! It happened. When Anita came home from abroad, Saulog lost because it was also the time that traditional painting was already waning."

For Aguinaldo, Saulog's—and every artist's—story is a "sad story" of struggle, although in Saulog's case, it's not entirely unfortunate. People still went to Saulog for commissioned works in his gallery in Imus. But instead of going abroad to study and hone his skills (which he could have done), he opted to teach those budding artists around him. These, of course, did not afford him to create a sizable fortune from his art, but then, says Aguinaldo, "he was happy the way he was, much to the displeasure



of a lot of people around him. 'What a waste of talent,' they felt."

In 1982-1983, Malayang Sining (formerly, Painters Club) was born, first as a school club based at Imus Institute, and then later, as a socio-civic organization supported by then Imus Mayor Jose Jamir, and mentored by Saulog—who conducted the group's art sessions for free.

For a "traditionalist" artist, Saulog as a mentor was rather "modern." Besides the classroom sessions, "we went out a lot: field trips, excursions, visits to galleries, museums..." Says Aguinaldo: "I think the reason why Saulog brought us to those places was because we could explore a lot of styles. He did not have this dream of perpetuating the old tradition...that's why we were called Malayang Sining ('free art'). We started out with the traditional approach, but he was open to—and even encouraged—the possibility that everyone would absorb or assimilate modernism. Ultimately, it was the artist who will decide."

At his age, Aguinaldo says he himself is still exploring a lot of styles, although these days, he tends "to become more modern due to the influence of a lot

of people." But still, Saulog remains his maestro. "Being with Saulog was like a long educational journey... It's amazing that when you talked with him everyday, you learned new things."

Another student, Hermie Baryas-Manalaysay, also a Malayang Sining member, related how Saulog influenced her by bringing "a shy girl" out of her shell: "He became our friend, our mentor and a father figure to all of us. He opened new doors for us and widened our horizons as artists." Among the more remarkable lessons she learned from Saulog was "the power of the mind." "He demonstrated this mind power when he had a stroke and his right hand could not move, yet he was able to paint with his left hand."

Fortunately, Saulog's art is experiencing a revival in our day. "If you talk about legacy, we at Malayang Sining cannot boast that we're the only ones taught by Saulog," says Aguinaldo. "There are others." In our day, thankfully we can view for ourselves how Tata Simon's legacy lives on.

GRAND RAFFLE DRAW
STARS
Share The Animo Raffle Surprise

Grand Prize: **₱500,000.00**

Grand Prize

2nd Prize: **₱300,000.00**
3rd Prize: **₱100,000.00**

2nd & 3rd Prizes

10 Minor Prizes: **₱10,000.00**
and other Consolation Prizes

10 Minor Prizes

₱100.00/Ticket: Buy 1 booklet & get 1 free ticket!
Tickets Available at: University Advancement Office
De La Salle Dasmariñas Alumni Association Office
Parents Organization of La Salle Cavite Office
For the benefit of the One La Salle Scholarship
Endowment Fund

Extended!
Grand Raffle
now
December 16,
2016

