

Good Morning, Cebu!

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Abellana: portrait of a master

"Tinong" as he is called by his followers, is the only Cebuano painter whose influence advantageously affected the artistic abilities of many Cebuanos.

As his influence spread to a vast number of students through years of teaching in the College of Architecture of the Cebu Institute of Technology (CIT) and the College of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines-Cebu (UPCC), artists brought honor to Cebu. Some are now nationally known figures in the likes of SYM (Sofronio Y. Mendoza now in Canada) and Romulo Galicano (now in Manila).

Maestro Abellana turned 74 last Jan. 30. Aside from his being



an accomplished painter and teacher, he is also an accomplished family man for having been able to father 10 second-generation Abellanas in his successful and fruitful marriage to Natividad Noel.

His method and dedication to teaching art has no taint of secrecy. It's a give-it-all process, "logical, based on facts," he says. He encouraged students to visit him in his hometown Carcar, so he can give them the extra lessons and demonstrations they

Abellana . . .

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need, without fees.

To him, the thought of discovering his heir-apparent is a great pleasure. However, he does not discriminate those who are really sincere to learn.

Abellana is the most prominent of all the portrait painters Cebu ever produced. If ever there will be another one after him, surely it would be one of his proteges.

Some art connoisseurs in our society believe that Abellana is the heir-apparent of Fernando Amorsolo. Others believe that the former is deeper than the latter. Be that as it may, Abellana will be remembered as Abellana.

"I was already an artist before I took up fine arts," the maestro answered when asked why he took up fine arts. "Love for art is inborn, but an artist should learn the techniques," he added.

Art books featuring the works of European masters, Da Vinci, Michelangelo and Rafael attracted the admiration of the young Abellana in 1924 when he was in Grade 3 in the elementary level. However, a year before finishing grade school, his interest and curiosity in the works of established masters shifted to Rembrandt upon seeing "The Portrait Of An Old Woman" painted in 1634 by the Dutch Master. "Nobody can beat Rembrandt when it comes to portrait, not even the calibers of Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese," he says.

So, it was clear that it was not only the maestro's ambition but a compulsion as well to become a portrait painter. Contented sitters like Anabelle Lu Ym, Dr. Gening Solano, Dr. Vivina Chiu and countless others can attest to the virtuosity of Abellana.

In 1933, he took up fine arts in Manila, enrolling at the

University of the Philippines (at the time near PGH, Paco district). One of his professors, Vicente Rivera Mir, upon realizing the tremendous talent of his Cebuano student advised Abellana to visit the Prado in Madrid, Spain, to see the works of the European masters.

Since it was obvious that he didn't have the means at that time, it took him nearly 50 years to fulfill the wish of Mir. In September of 1985, he finally took the trip, not only to the Prado in Spain but to the National Gallery of London, the Louvre in Paris and other major museums in Europe. It was there at the National Gallery of London that he saw the "Old Woman of Rembrandt. The European tour lasted until November of 1985.

Abellana is as sharp in his portraits as he is in his landscapes. He was not only able to master the method of teaching but the use of different media as well.

The maestro is comfortable with the traditional media such as pastel, watercolor, and oil.

During the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP) annual contests in 1952 and 1953, Abellana copped the first prize for each year in the conservative division for painting. He could have had more chances of winning awards had he decided to live in Manila and be proclaimed as the heir-apparent of Fernando Amorsolo. But he preferred to continue his art beside his brother Cebuanos and paint the scenes that sustain him in his love for art in his home town, Carcar.

After all, "If you don't have art in you, you can't find art wherever you go," the maestro declares. Which reminds us of Nathaniel Hawthorne when he wrote -- "If you don't bring love with you, you can't find love wherever you go."