



ARTLIFE

BART "BOY" KIAMKO

Remembering the Maestro on his 80th birth anniversary

Six years after the death of Artist Emeritus Martino Abellana, his memory not only lingers on but continues to influence a good number of visual artists.

I'm one of the beneficiaries of Maestro Tinong's unselfish, "give-it-all" process of teaching. Not to be forgotten is his methodical handling of our class in Visual Arts Fundamentals. He was a sincere friend, a loving father and a great teacher to those of us who pursued the visual arts. He encouraged the talented students to visit his hometown, Carcar, on weekends to learn more of the art of painting from him.

A week before the Maestro died, I wrote in the Feb. 26, 1988 issue of Sun-Star Daily.

"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 the course. "Love for art is inborn, but an artist learn the techniques," he added."

"Artbooks and magazines featuring the works of the European masters Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael (remember the Ninja turtles?) attracted the admiration of the young Abellana in 1924, while in grade three. However, a year be-

fore 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 caliber of Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese," he said.

"In 1933, he took up fine arts in Manila, enrolling at the University of the Philippines (at the time near the Philippine General Hospital (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 of Madrid, Spain, to see the works of the European masters."

Since it was obvious that he didn't have the means at the time, it took him nearly 50 years to fulfill the wish of Mir. In Sept. 1985, he finally took the trip, not 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 portrait of an old woman by Rembrandt. The European tour lasted three months.

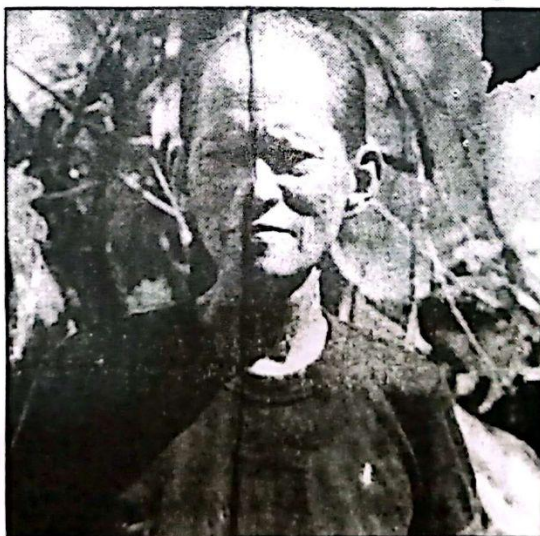
Jaime Picomell in his column Art and Culture in the March 10, 1988 issue of the Freeman wrote:

"We will forever mourn the passing away of Martino Abellana, an artist of the first magnitude,

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one of whom we knew for a long time, whose works in the most varied styles merited praiseworthy comment. We've seen his abstracts, his landscapes, and best of all, the portraits of the Cebuanos of the moment as well as the humble. Marino lived in Carcar, taught at UP, was ever expanding his horizons."

"He drew inspiration from his inner self, from the innate spirit that dwells within the true artist - to pursue beauty, and not to rest till it is achieved. And yet it always seems effortless to him. One recalls that on his first trip to Europe some years ago, he felt he had come to the sublime, yet one could also feel that



MARTINO ABELLANA a month before his death.

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all along he had known what it was all about, and had reached the same heights as those of the masters he admired.

Now, Maestro Abellana is one of those masters admired not only by his students but also by his numerous collectors. It was he who brought honor and dignity to the "lowly" painters by refusing to let go of his energies through commercialism, where the financial gain is tempting. Instead, he divided his time between teaching, painting portraits and periodic sojourns in the "countryside."

Sharing his expertise with his ever increasing followers had become his obsession. In 1968, I asked him how he managed to endure bumpy rides (the road from Cebu to Carcar then was most of the time bad to worst) daily to teach architecture students of two local universities.

"It's my commitment to art... I won't abandon the students who need me most. Besides, they (the school owners) haven't got anyone to take my place yet, was his reply.

When UPCC Fine Arts opened in the 70's, Abellana's techniques and theories came right through the works of his young students. But he seemed not contented, for he confided to me in 1988, a month before his death: "There's so much in the curriculum I would have wanted to change, but the decisions come from Manila."

It was then that his health

tor, otherwise quitting his teaching job may have given him more time to amass wealth by concentrating in painting the rich and famous. He did paint a select number of sitters, who have since become his friends... some for free.

By the time of his death, an unfinished portrait of Dr. Vivina Chiu was propped up in his easel. Nevertheless, it was halfway through and carried the character of the sitter. I had to convince her that most of the portraits the Master did may be forgotten in time, while hers would be remembered as "the unfinished one"... otherwise, she should have another artist to finish the portrait.

The Martino Abellana Retrospective exhibit at Arthaus on March 19, 1988 featured the oil portraits of men and women who were kind enough to loan their collection to Cely Valero, who made sure that maximum exposure would be attained. From the files of Picornell, these are the names:

"Doña Lolita Aboitiz, Don Ramon Aboitiz, Matias Asnar Fructuoso Cabahug, Mrs. Esperanza Cabahug, Dr. Pacita Libi Co, Gloria Duterte, Anita Gaisano, David Gaisano, Doña Modesta Gaisano, Stephen Gaisano (in his office, and in riding togs). Alma Maris Aznar Holopainen, the Japitana Family, Kang Po Chio

(Siao), Group portraits of Aniceta Larrazabal, Vicky L. Locsin and daughter Paula, Dr. Precy Lim, Sarah Abellana Lozano, Annabelle Corn Lu Ym, Rosita Lu Ym, Carmen Rodriguez de Martinez, Jose Martinez, Yolanda Oporto, Dr. Generosa Solano, Inday Teng, Teng Hoa Lim. And two figure paintings: The Boy with a Sling-shot and Mormon Lady."

Abellana was a naturalist. His landscape paintings are rich with the nuances of nature. The peace and quiet he needed could be had in the brooks and river banks and seashores in his hometown. Painting landscapes was the only time when pressure was zero. A clear reason why he was never

lured to live in big and Cebu.

Jan. 30 is the 80th anniversary of the late Martino Abellana. The clan honors him through the Modesta Gaisano Competition in Memory of Martino Abellana. This consecutive year, the Modesta Gaisano Foundation has available the sum of P100,000 for the winners of the test which is open aged 8 to 16. Truly admiration of the Cebuano community's greatest artist Martino Abellana.