

SEE THE PAINTINGS OF JUAN LUNA NOW ON EXHIBIT HERE – KNOW THE MAN

By Martino A. Abellana

Now on display at the Cebu Boy Scouts Building are 72 studies and sketches in oil by the Philippines most famous painter in the second half of the 19th century, Juan Luna. His fame persists until today and very surely will continue in the future although perhaps that fame may rest more on the historical importance rather than on the artistic.

The 72 works (sketches and studies) are historically important because they give the Filipino artist a sound tradition of discipline and craftsmanship which are important in the art of painting.

Technically, Juan Luna was akin to his contemporaries – the fashionable artists of Paris and Madrid of the 1880's. There were times also when the influence of impressionism appeared in his works. In the present exhibition, one can feel the swaggering brush strokes of fashionable painters; and the blue shadows and mystery of impressionism.

In his big and very ambitious paintings, the spirit of Luna, the artist, is almost drowned out by Luna, the Nationalist and patriot. In two of his very famous paintings, the "Spoliarium" and "The Kings and the Populace" we see his talking about his country in parables. One might say that Juan Luna was trying to merge his art with literary contents in the great tradition of Michelangelo, Raphael and others of the Renaissance period

A Herculean task indeed. Unfortunately, the merger sometimes resulted, as in the "Spoliarium", in works that were merely an oversized illustration. It is in the sketches and studies in oil that Juan Luna's greatness as an artist is shown. There is, in the short-hand studies, a calligraphy born of his feeling for pure art, unhindered even, by the very naturalism of his subject matter. Looking at this small painting, one senses a free, - therefore, happy artist. This spirit of freedom in modern artists was later to develop into a Van Gogh, a Picasso, a Toby and finally, a Pollock.

It is, therefore, in those small works like the ones on exhibit at the Boy Scout building, rather than in the big ones, that one can find Juan Luna at home and happy with art.

MARTINO A. ABELLANA
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