

The Freeman

One of the country's Top 10 community newspapers

VOL. XXII NO. 233 Sunday, March 13, 1988 CEBU CITY, PHILIPPINES



The painter as artist

TODAY. Happy Birthday to Mom Pening Rivera Gullas wherever she may be. And God love her always.

WELCOME. Rotary District Gov. Sar Estalilla, came home from the US last Thursday morning; the postcard he mailed in Nashville, Tenn., where he attended the RI convention, arrived last Friday. Welcome, Governor Sar!

CARCAR CASUALTIES. The town of Carcar has had this week quite a string to casualties -- ailment aggravated by age claimed their lives:

Carlos J. Cuizon (whose sister a Carcaranon, the mother of lawyer Ben Llanos), former Cebu City mayor; Martino A. Abellana, nationally known painter; and Anunciacion C. Noel, daughter of the late Rep. Maximino Noel (of the then second district of Cebu) and first cousin of painter Abellana's wife Nati. They were all septuagenarians.

Carling Cuizon and Tinong Abellana shared two outstanding virtues: both were soft-spoken and both were thorough gentlemen. No one simply could make enemies of them.

My condolence to the bereaved loved ones these three have left behind. It is easy to think, though, that they are now sharing the eternal glory of the Lord's presence.

72 DAYS, 72 KILLED. Today is the 73rd day of the year. Now correct me if I am wrong:

There have been 72 killings in 72 days in Cebu.

OIC. The Aquino administration will also be remembered as the most "OICious" in history. You know what I mean: OIC had never been a commonplace until Cory took over. Yet there is still another kind of OIC that wants to come in -- no, really, which some people want to come in, too.

It is the OIC from Organization of Islamic Conference, an association of Muslim countries which Speaker Ramon Mitra has proposed for the Philippines to join.

As Rep. Artemio A. Adaza Jr., congressman from the first district of Zamboanga del Norte (whom I met last Friday evening in Dumaguete), puts it "The OIC is getting to be a fad." Anyway, is the Philippines going to give up the distinction of being "the only Christian country in the Far East?" Well, as Congressman Art Adaza, one of the House's more erudite young men (surely a pride of his constituents in Zamboanga), has significantly observed:

"Muslim leaders -- especially in the OIC -- are not keen with women being heads of state like our country in having."

Perhaps, Speaker Mitra was not this keen with his perception.

ABELLANA. Yesterday, as scheduled, a Martino Abellana art exhibit (a "retrospective") opened at the Arthaus on Gorordo. But Tinong was not there; he will be interred this afternoon in Carcar (his cousin-in-law Anun Noel was buried yesterday).

Tinong Abellana was not just a painter; he was, foremost, an artist. He was not just an artist, he was well, and above all, a nationally recognized, prize-winning artist, a master many of whose works now adorn the walls of many a home and public building here & abroad. As his fellow artist and fellow UP alumnus Julian Jumalon has said, "I don't know when another generation could produce another Abellana."

Tinong's reverence for Fernando Amorsolo (his teacher at UP) so overflowed from his heart & hands that, watching Tinong do a painting, one would soon behold Amorsolo and Abellana landscapes, for instance, one feels, inspire subject-nature to cheer them for the richness of their fidelity to its visual fact. Abellana, no wonder, became Amorsolo's favorite student.

But Amorsolo and Abellana had their own separate distinctive artistry, style you might put it. The latter was not imitative of the former. I would even say that Abellana was occasionally more daring than Amorsolo in taunting the challenge of the beautiful.

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That is why, knowing Tinong since I was this high (and he had known me since I was a baby, for he was a grade school pupil of my father), I can only disagree with anyone who unqualifiedly calls him a conservative artist. Tinong's courageous paletadas and bold brushes belie the classification.

Tinong Abellana was, first of all, a specimen of discipline. He was himself a disciple of discipline. Which has made his works strongly structured and stand out from the rest. While many among the rest were mere painters, period, Tinong was solidly an artist as painter.

Because a painter who has any claim as artist must first know how to draw (like Boy Kiamko does know in his own right). Without the discipline of drawing, the painter, wanting of, but cannot erect, the needed constitution, can only escape -- if he can -- into such "safehouses" as "modernism" or "impressionism" (without impressing or being impressed) or caricature (without even succeeding in being a caricaturist).

Tinong is gone. but he has left a treasure of his works which future generations will continually enjoy. He and his works have become classic. He has left us beauty. By his death, Tinong now deserves the most beautiful wonder of them all: the splendor of Eternal Light. After all, he had led a spendidly clean life.

COM-CORN DEP'T. When Marcos was in, amnesty International decried human rights violations by the military. Marcos reacted, saying that he did not tolerate such abuses, the AI charge was "one-sided," but he'd go after the violators. Anti-Marcos people hailed the AI for this.

Now it would seem that Cory Aquino is getting the dose of the same medicine. Amnesty International last week accused Aquino's military of violating human rights. The President has reacted similarly as Marcos. But have you heard any anti-Cory people hail AI for this? (Sunday, 13 March 1988)



SCULPTURE: Don Martino Abellana (second from right), painter emeritus of Cebu who passed away recently, did not excell only in portrait painting but also in sculpture. One of the most valuable scuptural works he had a hand in during his lifetime was the huge statue of the late Dona Modesta Singson Gaisano, the making of which he personally supervised. The statue (shown above) is made of native lomboy wood and was dedicated to dona Modesta on her 99th birth anniversary on Jan. 2, 1984. Don Martino has done slx portralts of Dona Modesta for her children. The great Cebuano painter will be interred today. (Photo courtesy of Galsano Main)