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Edades and the 13 Moderns (1948)

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[ARCHIVES]

Edades and the 13 Moderns (1948)

*Victorio C. Edades, Guillermo E. Tolentino, and
Emelyn G. Advincula, with design by Rod Paras-Perez*

Traditional historiography relies on the identification of events with which succeeding events and other historical shifts categorically get associated. The comparative dearth in texts on Philippine modernism, for instance, has made the oft-cited pre- then post-WWII debates between conservatives and modernists a recurrent peg in the telling of stories about modernism in the country. The reproduced clippings making up part of the debate which appears in this section came from the catalogue, *Edades and the 13 Moderns* curated by the artist-historian Rod Paras-Perez.

Apart from the two main disputants (Guillermo Tolentino and Victorio Edades), the published debates drew input from other thinkers from academic and artistic circles of the period. The primary exchanges saw print in 1936 and again in 1948 between sculptor and art educator of the University of the Philippines Guillermo Tolentino and painter and, later, art educator of the University of Santo Tomas Victorio Edades. Tolentino was awarded the National Artist Award for Sculpture in 1973 and Edades was awarded National Artist for Painting in 1976.

DISTORTION IN ART

by VICTORIO C. EDADES (FIRST OF A SERIES OF THREE ARTICLES)

TOLENTINO: My dear Prof. Edades: Being of the old school, I naturally detest modernists and their art... They paint in crazy lines and produce work that belongs to the category of freaks... I am only too sorry for the public because I shall not answer any article you might waste your time on.

5 Retiro Street
Rizal Park
January 26, 1936

EDADES: Dear Prof. Tolentino: I know you don't want to carry on with our discussion on Modern Art. The main reason I insist on having a friendly discussion on the subject with you is my desire to show you that your idea about Modern Art is prejudiced; and your prejudice is unfounded to say the least. We owe it therefore, to our students that we teach them the truth about art and its relation to life itself. As educators, we should place the student's welfare above personal friendship. This being so, we can't but hurt the feeling of some of our friends who happen to obstruct student's progress either unconsciously or consciously.

Edades Studio
2231 Azzaraga, Manila
March 9, 1936

TOLENTINO: Yes, I do like Modern Art, but I also like the ancient and primitive art... I do not like those distorted ones...

EDADES: Twelve years ago, Mr. Tolentino did not like any piece of Modern Art. Today he realizes his mistake and begins to admire all Modern Art except that which has distortion in it. This is an encouraging sign, and if Mr. Tolentino will study carefully the reasons why some artists have introduced distortion in their works from the most primitive times to our own era, then his efforts will pay a high dividend—the ability to appreciate many masterpieces in which distortion occurs.

Mr. Tolentino said he likes ancient and primitive art, not realizing that there is distortion in the works of the ancient Egyptians and Greeks. Primitive Negro art is full of distortion.

Distortion abounds in the Christian art of the Medieval period; and we also find it in the late Renaissance period during the 17th Century; the Chinese and Persians among the Oriental artists have a certain amount of distortion in their works. Thus, one can readily see that distortion is not the invention of the Moderns, as Mr. Tolentino seems to think. For art is ever the expression of man's emotion, and not a mere photographic likeness of nature. Thus to express his individual emotion, the artist is privileged to create in that distinctive form which best interprets his own experience. And the distortion of plastic elements of art—such as line, mass, and color—is one of the many ways of expressing one's rhythmic form.

Commenting on Archipenko's cubistic and distorted sculpture, "Family Life," Professors George Chase and Chandler Post of Harvard University have this to say in their *History of Sculpture*: "The sacrifice of veristic representation to the dictates of interpretative or aesthetic ends is no new thing in art. Indeed, no art is anything but photographic that does not make such a sacrifice."

Thus we see how a Greek sculptor of the 6th Century B.C. at the Temple of Selinus in Sicily distorted the left leg of the Gorgon in "Perseus Cutting the Head of the Gorgon in the Presence of Athena," in order to adapt his design to the metope of the temple. In one of the Spanish Romanesque capitals (S. Cugat del Valles) the legs of one of the acrobats are distorted and made very small, too small for the head, in order to conform to the height of the capital of the column. At the west portal of the cathedral at Chartres, France, the figures were distorted, elongated, and given a column-like stiffness in order to subordinate them to the verticality of the Gothic architecture expressive of the spirituality of the medieval art. The Cologne Masters of the 14th Century are noted for their masterpieces in which the people are "rendered not photographically, but by means of plastic units formed by distortion of all the features and other parts of the body," (Italics mine.)

At the beginning of the 17th Century

there emerged one of the world's greatest artists—El Greco. The chief characteristic of El Greco's masterpieces is the distortion of all plastic elements of painting—line, color, light and mass in the interest of design and in order to express emotional frenzy and achieve supernatural mysticism in his religious subjects. And about two hundred years after El Greco died another great artist lived who, through distortion, gave structure to an otherwise flat impressionism. He was Cezanne. In Cezanne's works, one can readily see that distortions are to be found not only in the faces and other parts of the human body, but also in all the plastic elements, including line, mass and space. Cezanne learned from El Greco how normal planes in nature can be distorted and built up into a new and distinctive form.

Today, forty years after the great Modern, Cezanne, died, the words *distortion*, *abstraction*, and *surrealism* have ceased to be novelties. The Cubism of Braque, Picasso, Gris, Leger, and Metzinger had its beginning in the expression of Cezanne: "Tout dans la nature se modèle selon le sphere, le cone, et le cylindre; il faut s'apprendre à peindre ces figures simples, on pourra ensuite faire tout ce qu'on voudra." (Everything in nature is modeled on the sphere, the cone, and the cylinder; we must teach ourselves how to paint these simple figures, and then we can do whatever we wish.) From this statement Cubism was born. *Cubism* was originally a nickname intended to discredit Picasso and his comrades. The picture which brought about this word, *Cubism*, contains, in fact, cubic figures. But in its later development, Cubism has nothing whatever to do with cubes.

Today's cubism is characterized by dissected and newly organized planes, each plane containing some recognizable elements of the external world, which are rearranged in order to create a new form of aesthetic appeal. Looking at a cubist painting as at any plastic form, pure and simple, with hardly any reference to any object with which we are familiar in the external world, we see a myriad of relations between line, color and space which result in the production of a number of plastic units which in turn unite into an organic whole.

The Renaissance painter painted a

picture from one—and only one—station point, or point of view. Every detail of the picture was valid only from the unalterable position of the first spectator, the painter. The Cubist painter, however, feels the need of a more essential representation of an object's manifold aspects: Thus he sees the object from different points of view; namely, from the front, front above, in profile, and in a three-quarter profile. The "distorted" object on the canvas is the amalgamation of these different views from various different points. At times the Cubist painter goes around the object, noting its different aspects—front, sides, and back—and places these different views on transparent picture-planes parallel to each other. The "cubistic" painting is the result after viewing the transparent pictures simultaneously.

One of the several contributions of the Cubists is the creation of a new spatial expression. This contribution, together with some other cubistic devices such as texture and surface treatment, as seen in their *collages*, became the stimulus for a new typography and have affected the arts of photography, advertising, motion pictures, and the theater. To be sure, Picasso is not so great as Cezanne or Renoir; nevertheless, he is the most versatile living artist today.

TOLENTINO: "A lot has been said in favor of Modern Art... However, up to the present nothing has been said about Classical Art."

EDADES: Tolentino's implication that there is controversy between the modern artists and the so-called "classical artists" in the Philippines is untrue. We Philippine Modern artists attack the *Academics* of this country—those painters and teachers who either consciously or unconsciously obstruct the progress of art and who are responsible for the low level of art appreciation in this country by teaching the public that copying somebody else's paintings is legitimate; that portraiture which flatters is art; that naturalism and realism are the only criteria by which art is to be judged; and that "Classical Art" is the only standard by which today's art is to be appraised and appreciated.

The Moderns in this country, like the Moderns anywhere else, do not attack Classic Art—the creation of the great Greek and Renaissance artists, those

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giants who expressed their own times in original works. Every living writer of consequence on Art—John Dewey, Dr. Barnes, Roger Fry, Craven,—has emphasized and is still emphasizing how much the great Moderns have been influenced by the classical artists from the early Renaissance Master, Giotto, down to the late Renaissance painters, Velasquez and El Greco—showing to us that the art of the Moderns continues the tradition of the Renaissance masters. The conclusion is, therefore, obvious; namely, the great Moderns are inheritors of the Classical tradition. Consequently, how can they hate Classic Art?

TOLENTINO: "Don't you know the meaning of the words Academic, Classical and Modern? Academic, as the dictionary defines it, is scholarly; classical. Classical—of or pertaining to the highest class or rank."

EDADES: I wish to clarify Mr. Tolentino's confusion of Classic Art with Academic. He seized upon the following definition of *academic* which he found in a dictionary: "scholarly, classical," not realizing that this definition has nothing to do with the word *academic* as applied to art but instead concerns university instruction—for example, academic studies—which meaning is expanded in Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 5th edition, to "classical or liberal rather than technical or professional." But *academic* applied to art is defined as "conventional;" and *conventional* means "lacking in spontaneity, originality, or individuality." Webster's Universities Dictionary (unabridged) defines *conventional* further: "In the fine arts, (a) depending on accepted models or traditions, irrespective of the true principles of art."

Definitely, Academic Art is not Classical Art but only its counterfeit.

There can be no doubt as to the inferiority and utter worthlessness of academic art when all great writers are unanimous in their condemnation of the academic mind and its products. For instance: the well known philosopher, John Dewey, in the course of his lecture on art at Harvard University in 1931, said, "A rigid pre-determination of an end product whether by artist or beholder leads to the turning out of a mechanical or *academic* product." John Dewey further said: "Thus in the later seventeenth cen-

tury, the treatment of dramatic movement characteristic of Titian and still more of Tintoretto, by means chiefly of light and shade, is exaggerated to the point of the theatrical. In Guercino, Caravaggio, Feti, Caracci, Ribera, the attempt to depict movement dramatically results in posed tableaux and defeats itself. In this third stage... technique is borrowed without relation to the urgent experience that at first evoked it. The *academic* and eclectic result." Dr. Albert Barnes, the eminent authority on art, says in his book *The Art of Painting*: "To look merely for professional competence in painting is academicism; it is to mistake the husk for the kernel, the shadow for the substance." Bernard Shaw, said, "All this academic art is far worse than the trade in sham antique furniture...whereas your academic copier of fossils offers them to you as the latest outpouring of the human spirit." Thomas Craven in his book *Men of Art* said: "The *academic system*, the salvation of the popular and fashionable artist, has been the *mortal enemy* of originality...The conflict between the elaborately entrenched *academicians* and the intelligent minority is described by Balzac in his tale of a stupid painter, who, by doing what he was told to do and painting what was expected of him, rose to wealth and fame, while his confreres, worthy and genuine artists but insubordinate, were despised and rejected." (Italics mine.)

TOLENTINO: I have read the same article and saw the family tree you refer to...But start from the principal root, Velasquez, the giant, the master, the greatest realist, colorist and draftsman of all times—and end into nameless multilators, deformists of the form—that to our author is the family tree of Modern Art. What a sacrilege!

EDADES: Mr. Tolentino can not understand why Velasquez is the principal root of the tree of Modern Art.

The history of Modern Art is broadly the history of the development of form by means of color. Technically, Modern Art is a natural evolution of methods which had their origin in the Florentine painting of the Early Renaissance. Giotto and Massaccio were the great masters of this period. Giotto and Massaccio were studied by Leonardo and Michaelangelo and Titian of the Venetian school. Titian's

overtones of color and the well-recognized Venetian glow were studied by Velasquez and Goya, who in turn influenced and inspired Manet, the father of Modern Art. Velasquez's influence on the great Moderns is well known. Velasquez's power to select and detach the essential elements of objects by ignoring the superfluous details is apparent in both Manet and Cezanne's paintings. Claude Monet's use of colored shadows and Renoir's delight in the visible qualities of the world of everyday people and events are all traced back to Velasquez's profound influence. Thus, one can readily see why Velasquez is the principal root of the tree of Modern Art.

The Impressionists—chiefly Manet, Monet and Renoir—successfully depicted realism in different aspects of nature bathed in sunshine and *plein air* (the air we breathe outdoors.) They were the first artists to accomplish this. Even the great and brilliant Leonardo da Vinci, with the characteristic thoroughness, had failed to realize that luminosity could be depicted with paint, and had contented himself with declaring that if a finished painting was to look like nature, it should be viewed in the sunlight.

Renoir made further researches in the impressionistic methods, resulting in the production of more sensuous charm, and glowing iridescence. His new discoveries combined with the influence of Velasquez, Goya and Courbet, produced a distinctive plastic form which had a profound influence on the succeeding artists.

Cezanne combined the atmospheric aims of the Impressionists with his own discovery of the structural function of colors. This was another step forward in the development of modern methods.

Renoir as a colorist is ranked with Velasquez, Goya and Giorgione. Cezanne, with his natural ability to form original and powerful designs combined with the influences of Michaelangelo and El Greco, created masterpieces which rank with those of the very best artist of all time. Such great Moderns as Cezanne, Renoir, Monet, Manet, Gauguin and Van Gogh, to mention only a few, are now hung side by side with the greatest classical masters in the great museums of the world.

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If we consider the fact that it took three thousand years for Egyptian art to reach its highest development; Greek art, one thousand five hundred years; Medieval art, one thousand years; and Renaissance art four hundred years; then the Modern Art Movement is not at all behind when one realizes that it has already produced several great men in the space of only one hundred years.

TOLENTINO: That is true. But I may cite the famous expression of Abraham Lincoln—"You can fool some of the people all the time, and the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time."

EDADES: Mr. Tolentino thinks the Modern Artists are not serious and are just fooling the people. I wonder if Mr. Tolentino thinks his own Director, Fernando Amorsolo, was fooled by the four Filipino Modern painters whose paintings he voted as better than those of all of his fellow U.P. professors (except one) who participated in the last AAP competition. A large mass of material has been written about the great Modern Artists during these last one hundred years. It records their sacrifices and tribulations in their fight against ignorance—and worse: against fossilized and academic minds, closed minds of people who refuse to see the light even if that light burns under their very noses. Many of these Modern artists have been villified, persecuted, jailed and outlawed for painting pictures not in conformity with the fashion of the day. They welcomed the opportunity to sacrifice and even died for their conviction rather than prostitute their art. If these acts of the great Moderns are not signs of sincerity and seriousness of purpose what else, what better proof can there be?

TOLENTINO: I adore modern architecture. I admire highly the modern architect.

EDADES: Adoring modern architecture is inconsistent with abhorring modern painting. It is absurd to see a streamlined building built by the Modern architect Le Corbusier, decorated by statues done by the Classic Michaelangelo and on whose walls are murals by the Renaissance painter Raphael. That would be as incongruous as a Filipino girl in a Maria Clara

dress riding a bicycle with a lunch box on her arm.

TOLENTINO: Other works of art that do not possess the quality to please the onlookers are just the opposite—they are anti-aesthetic.

EDADES: You do not need an artist to please the onlookers. Clever portrait painters who flatter the sitters can do that. For sheer entertainment Walt Disney's caricatures are guaranteed to please. He is the man you want.

TOLENTINO: The aim of the ancient masters was to transfer beauty and perfection in nature to their works of art. This is precisely the aim of contemporary Classical artists.

EDADES: Mr. Tolentino implies that Greek and Renaissance artists simply copied nature on their canvases and in their sculptures. This is not true. If works of art were merely imitations of nature, then art would always be inferior to nature and would not be worth the honor which every civilized nation pays to her art treasures. Granting, for the sake of argument, that the ancient masters merely imitated nature's beauty, then all the art works of that period would have been alike, because nature, as a model, would have remained the same for some time.

But this is not so. Praxitelean slenderness contrasts completely with the stocky figures of Polyclitus. And neither of their works resemble the works of Scopas, who delighted to show the storm and stress of life in his sculptures. Again, Lysippus introduced a different canon of proportions, with a smaller head and a slimmer body. The paintings of the great artists of the Renaissance period show a variety of forms. Thus Botticelli excelled in linear design while Giotto composed units of patterns in big masses. The calm and reposeful works of Giorgione differ from the dramatic and dynamic compositions of Tintoretto and Veronese.

Thus one can see that art is not an imitation of nature but is the expression of the emotion of the artist. In objectifying his feeling in his works, the artist is influenced by his environment: climate, his economic status, his religious beliefs and his social ideals. In short, art is the record of the

personality of the artist.

What is true of the work of an individual artist is equally true of the art produced by whole countries in one period of history. The same influences that affect the individual artist's work, affect the collective art of the period. Since no two civilizations are alike, it follows that the art they produce will be different. Thus we have as many different arts of the past as there were civilizations to produce them. We have Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Gothic, Chinese, Renaissance and other arts. Obviously our present civilization produces a different type of Art. Hence, the birth of Modern Art.

Mr. Tolentino speaks of "contemporary Classical artists" in the Philippines, but to be a Classical artist in the 20th Century is impossible. The Greek and Renaissance artists were contented with a limited area to work in while the Moderns wish to move freely in space. While Rembrandt was contented to paint with light effects from the roof of his studio against the dark background of shadow, the Modern artist goes outdoors and paints nature's luminosity, making even his shadows translucent and vibrant. The Classical artist painted from only one point of view; the Modern paints from all conceivable angles: the front, the side, above, from a fixed point, and from a moving station point. A Filipino artist cannot imitate the Classical artist even if he wants to, because the classical environment and cultural milieu which produce a Phidias, a Michaelangelo, a Velasquez and a Rembrandt has passed into oblivion. Santayana remarked "Greek art can only be admired but not realized."

A Filipino artist need not imitate the Classics. He can be great in his own right, as a Filipino, Broadened and made more sensitive by the contemplation of Classical art and of Oriental decorative patterns, and inspired by this rich environment of ours, he should recreate his Philippine surroundings into distinctive artistic forms characteristic of our race, our traditions and our soil, and thus contribute to a world-pattern of art in the 20th Century.

THIS WEEK, SEPTEMBER 12, 1948

DISTORTION IN ART

by G. E. TOLENTINO

The writer claims that distortion in painting, as in all other arts, is a cardinal sin.

HERE comes again my interlocutor, with his first question—Professor, what do you say about the three long articles by Mr. Edades?

Some are repetitions of what he said before but, all in all, there is nothing in them but distortions.

Is there beauty in distortions? Don't ask me. Mr. Edades is not fond of beauty, nor is he after beauty. He himself confessed that he purposely looked for distortions in all works of art. If there is no distortion then it is photographic, and photographic painting, according to him, is not art.

Maybe it is beauty after all, otherwise he would not advocate nor propagate distortions in art.

Your common sense will tell you that there is absolutely no beauty, viewing any angle of any distorted thing. A distorted line is not a straight line. A distorted leg can never be termed a million-dollar-leg. A distorted face is the ugliest face you can think of. Distorted feet of a Chinese girl make her walk awkwardly and she might tumble any moment. Distorted limbs of rig horses make them walk and run limply and clumsily in great contrast to the well balance size, form and proportion of the limbs of riding or race horses. So with the legs of freaks and other born dwarfs in contrast to the shapely legs of ballet dancers and Hollywood beauties. Unbalanced or distorted lenses of eyeglasses make one feel dizzy. Hoarse or distorted voice of a singer resembles howling, groaning or growling of a mad dog in distress. Distorted reception of any radio receiver is horrible and unintelligible. Distorted note of music destroys the beautiful harmony of the whole piece. In other words, all kinds of distortions are awful, specially in art.

Did you really hate the modernists and modern art twelve years ago?

I might have hated them and their art for, of all people, Mr. Edades picked and pestered me and insisted that I swallow his distorted art. Now I cannot hate them any more but pity them

because I know full well that no sane Filipino will ever believe in their distorted philosophies nor patronize their distorted wares.

He says I did not like modern art twelve years ago and now according to his understanding I realized my mistake. If his intention is to distort the belief of his readers, I write this answer to straighten out all that concerns me and other facts that cannot be distorted at will. It has been understood from the beginning that I did not like modern art, mind you, the distorted modern art before; I do not like it now, and I shall never like it. What I like is the sane, normal, beautiful modern art of Amorsolo and a million other contemporary sane art created by man. They are remodeled, stylized and improved continuously to suit the surrounding modes of the moment. But the one who created them never changes in his physical construction. His anatomy according to his own race is forever the same since time immemorial. He is the classical masterpiece of God. Even the plant has its own anatomy that cannot be altered by man. Who was the first person to change distort and uglify these masterpiece of God? The so-called sculptor and painter. Why? They ignore God and His creation completely for they follow no law, no rule, no formula, no basic principles and skeleton, no soul, uglier than any ugly thing imaginable in creating their art, for they do not need any art instructions as they themselves admit. How can I like their art? Am I inconsistent? Mr. Edades again is confused by his abuse of the word *modern*.

Mr. Edades said that you do not need an artist to please the onlookers. Clever portrait painters can do that.

Of course, the distortionist's dream is to satisfy and flatter himself and horrify the onlookers afterwards. Cezanne and Van Gogh both portrait painters whose favorite sitters were themselves, both great masters and inheritors of the method of the giant Velasquez according to Mr. Edades, were neither artist nor clever portrait painter after all. How pitiful is their downfall caused by their own admirer's followers and imitators!

Why, Sir what do you mean?

Don't you know these two portrait painters whose favorite subjects were themselves? They failed to flatter

themselves, much less the onlookers, except their admirers and imitators, for every time they paint their self-portraits they produce new monstrosities and not a bit looking like themselves. In persons they were both ugly with a stupid look in their eyes and all their self-portraits seemed to be copied from other uglier persons besides themselves.

Perhaps they purposely deviated from their own likeness because they were not photographers, and besides that's how they saw themselves.

Not at all. On the contrary, they tried very very hard over and over again with the extreme desire to immortalize themselves, but because of their own shortcomings, they failed. The vivid proof is the case of a flower. Cezanne tried to copy an artificial rose. After two months of ceaseless effort he was able to paint something like a piece of rock and not a flower. What a master, a very great master indeed according to Mr. Edades!

Mr. Edades said that you imply the Greek and Renaissance artists simply copied nature on their canvases and in their sculptures.

A very poor and false hypothesis. It is understood that when a painter or a sculptor conceives an idea he at once prepares his materials and a particular model adapted to suit his composition. He starts depicting his idea on canvas or clay in rough sketch, then he calls his model to pose, imitating as much as possible the posture in his sketch. The model naturally cannot interpret the idea, the conception, the expression, poise and movement which the artist has in his mind. He looks once in a while at the model to refresh his eyes with the anatomy and the light and shade of the figure. The finishing touches reveal his real technique, style, originality, personality, characteristic and the soul of life he puts in his new creation. He never copies nor imitates the works of other artists. If he ever goes abroad to see the world, his main purpose is to see as many works of great masters in all Art Galleries, Museums and Monuments for the recreation of his soul, not to copy anything but to avoid repeating the same ideas, grouping of figures, technique and all. He is the master in his own right and would not be influenced by others. If he ever teaches, he guides his pupils in the

Pablo Picasso, *Seated Woman* (1938)

LIBERATING OURSELVES FROM ACADEMISM

(Second of a series of three articles)

This painter says that Modern Art has given our progressive artists a valid direction.

by VICTORIO C. EDADES

THE first post-war exhibition of Filipino paintings held two months ago by the Artists Association of the Philippines (AAP) stirred up tremendous interest and controversy of considerable proportions. The cause of this unusual concern was the awarding of all prizes to the young, progressive painters who identified themselves with a group called the 13 Moderns. While this progressive group viewed the jury's judgment as only natural in the light of contemporary views on art the world over, the dyed-in-the-wool conservatives, on the other hand, couldn't swallow their pride and published indignant articles in which they tried desperately to stave off the complete collapse that awaits them in the future.

The controversy between the Moderns and the Academics in this country is not new. It started 14 years ago when the first Modern mural appeared at the Capitol Theatre. Since then the battle has raged and the number of Moderns continues to grow. Obviously there is need for a re-examination of our whole attitude towards the fine arts. If the fine arts in the Philippines are to flourish in proportions commensurate with our present political advance, we need a determined, analytical stock-taking of our individual and national approach to the whole field of thinking in the fine arts. Genuine appreciation of art here is, of course, at a low level and has been for the last 100 years.

We do have an awakening of national consciousness, which carries a good many implications. One of these should be the rise of self-confidence in a great many fields, among them the creative arts. Our accomplishment in the fine arts, however, cannot get very far until there is an earnest desire to pass the stage of apprenticeship to 19th Century European methods with their deadening academic influence. Our people should be told the truth about artistic creation, both good and bad.

right direction, slowly, methodically, imbuing in their young minds the basic principles of all great works of arts, no other than the True, the Good and the Beautiful. He never compels them to copy nor imitate his or others' style and technique but helps them develop their own as their own handwritings. This is the same method used by real artists throughout the ages.

The so-called modern painters and sculptors on the other hand, as I have seen them work in their studios in America and Europe, made their models pose in the most inartistic postures, tried hard to paint or model their ideas, looking at their models once in a while but the finished products were neither human beings nor animals in the prehistoric times. I asked one of them while at work, why he employed a model when he could do his work without one, and he replied, "Fool! this is how I see the model, so what do you care?" All the illustrations Mr. Edades used in his articles, proved the veracity of my contentions.

But Mr. Edades quoted a long chain of names of masters in the New and Old World in his articles with which he intends to prove he knows what he is talking about.

Unfortunately so, but no one of those great masters whose works are treasured jealously in all Art Galleries and

Museums throughout the world was a distortionist and had nothing to do or had any connection whatsoever with their distorted arts.

But they, the distortionists, are the inheritors of the methods of those masters or classical artists.

He must be dreaming. The truth is, they are the inheritors of the ancient primitives. They inherited the distortions and horrible figures of the primitives that he is championing and trying hard to propagate in this country for more than two decades. Thank God he has but two devoted disciples so far.

Murillo a very promising young painter walked on foot from Seville to Madrid, only to serve the great Velasquez and study under him. He learned more than he needed but he was not able to imitate his master nor follow his *method* though they were always together. He followed the dictates of his conscience being a born artist and a genius in his own right. His technique and style were different from those of his Maestro, and he became the greatest religious painter Spain has ever produced. It must be a miracle how these distortionists nowadays inherited the *method* of Velasquez and other masters of old.

THIS WEEK, NOVEMBER 7, 1948,

LIBERATING OURSELVES FROM ACADEMISM

Prejudice, personal taste, and even a predilection for sentiment still govern our judgement and appreciation. We in the Philippines are still slaves to accuracy, to photographic delineation and to prettiness of surface coloring. It is a common thing to hear a landscape praised if it approaches the naturalistic appearance of its subject. If one can paint a pretty girl with sufficiently vivid color as to be worthy of decorating a calendar or the top of a candy box one is forthwith a new "master." If one or two of our countrymen win prizes abroad for historical knickknacks which are good only for documentary purposes, or win recognition with an alien subject-matter and style, then we are satisfied and believe we are internationally recognized for our art.

Like many other countries we are out of focus, out of perspective. Every country has its cycle of advancement and decadence. For 200 years Europe was in a state of decadence—artistically. Bad art produced by her academicians filled Europe for several generations, until it had its own revolt which gave rise to Modern Art.

Modern Art has had far-reaching effects. It has opened the eyes of the progressive painters of the Philippines to the inadequacy of their artistic effort for many years in the past, and at the same time enabled them to see clearly in what direction they should go in order to achieve a genuine Philippine art.

In order to understand thoroughly and appreciate fully this newly discovered direction we should briefly review those factors which brought about the birth of Modern Art in France about a hundred years ago.

When Manet in the middle of the last century launched an attack against the officially recognized art—the Academic Art of France—he was only half conscious of the world-wide significance of the Modern Art movement which he initiated and which today is fast revolutionizing artistic standards in all lands.

Like all countries in the world, the Philippines feels the influence of Modern Art and dreads it at the beginning. To the majority of Filipinos, the phrase connotes a jumble of abstract, zigzag lines thrown together in a seemingly haphazard way which is mis-

called Cubism or Futurism. To others, Modern Art signifies the breaking up of Classical traditions and the flaunting of the childish products of the Dadaists. There is nothing further from the truth. This is not surprising at all because in every country, Modern Art has always been misunderstood at first. What is surprising in this country is the attempt of some people who are supposed to know what it is, to discredit Modern Art by spreading the false idea that the works of a few eccentric jugglers are representative products of Modern Art.

To deny that there are charlatans in any art movement of any age and in any country is ridiculous. But to hold up to the people the works of these charlatans as representative works of the Moderns is equally absurd and unfair. Nothing can be gained by shutting our minds to the truths which the Moderns present to us without giving them a thorough study. On the other hand, there is everything to gain if we devote some effort and time to the development of a truly creative appreciation for the works of the best Moderns.

After one has acquired the key to all of the seeming mysteries of Modern Art, he enriches his life by being able to live through the modern artist's experiences and emotions which are objectified in his masterpieces. We should develop that kind of patience and scholarship practiced by that most cultured of Englishmen, Havelock Ellis, when he persistently studied Modern Art until at last he could appreciate Cezanne, the greatest Modernist, with the same fervor that he appreciated Rubens, the great Flemish Renaissance painter.

What is Modern Art? Contrary to the popular belief, it is an outgrowth of Renaissance Art and is a rehabilitation of the Classical values and sentiment which were lost sight of during the decadent periods of the Baroque and the anemic Neo-Classical Art. Born to create for the modern world masterpieces, not as reminiscences of past works of art, but as a new and potent reality, Modern Art was also a direct revolt against Academic Art, the official art of France.

In order to understand fully Modern Art and how it came into being, we must know what Academic Art is which in the Philippines is confused

with Classical Art.

Academic Art, as it is understood today in the art world, comprises those paintings or sculptures which fall under any or all of the following classifications: (1) A painting is academic when it follows a formula. The Carracci brothers of Italy reduced Raphael's paintings to a formula and filled Europe during the 17th Century with Neo-Raphael madonnas. (2) A painting is academic when its color is copied outright from somebody else's works. Guido Reni's imitation of Raphael's colors is offensive. (3) A painter is an Academic when his chief pre-occupation is his technique to the exclusion of the realization of plastic values. Sargent is an example of this kind of academism. As Professor Isaacs points out, "Sargent seized upon the characteristics of his sitter skillfully but he failed to perceive accurately, as the old masters would have done, the exact relation between the ovoid head existing before its background, which is vertical plane." Besides, Sargent's coloring is merely a superficial synthesis of that of Manet and Velasquez. (4) Eclecticism is also academism. When a painter takes over the technique of one of his predecessors without sharing the vision which animated it, he takes over a mortal body but loses its immortal soul. Some writers charge Whistler with having a tendency to be academic because he failed to put animation in the combined technique which he borrowed from Velasquez and Hokusai.

The predominant kind of academism in France which flourished throughout the 17th, the 18th, and half of the 19th centuries and which was one of the main causes of the revolt, was characterized by such utter worship for the Greek and Roman civilizations that the artists thought it was impossible to achieve dignity, majesty and grandeur unless they soaked themselves in what they believed to be Hellenic or Roman atmosphere, portraying its attendant gods and heroes to the exclusion of subjects they had directly experienced. The most notorious of these Academics were David, Cabanel, Bouguereau, and, to a lesser extent, Puvis de Chavannes.

But unfortunately, the environment which produced the Classic forms had passed into oblivion. Consequently these painters were dealing

with dead things. To attempt to paint, therefore, Classic pictures in a later age is to produce a curiosity of art which is neither contemporary nor ancient. It is not even a copy of a genuine Classic painting, but a hybrid. "When knowledge is divorced from current activities, from new needs and new experiences," said Craven, "it becomes the tool of the historian and the archeologist." Under such a category fall also many of our so-called Philippine masterpieces, valuable only insofar as they teach us historical anecdotes and facts. Has not Santayana said, "Greek art can only be admired but not realized"?

In most Academic artists, contemporary life inspires no independent action. They are held in bondage by the works of their predecessors and by accumulated art forms bearing little or no relation to their own experience. Their point of view is not creative but historical and archeological. In essence, the Academic represents the conventional as opposed to the original.

Is it strange, therefore, that amidst this stifling artistic atmosphere, and independent figure should emerge to release the lightning that started the greatest revolution in the history of art? This was Manet and with him came Impressionism. The fight was carried on by succeeding artists—Renoir, Monet, Pissarro, Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse and Picasso.

Like all other important developments in either science or art, Impressionism was not of sudden birth. Like the Renaissance Art, Modern Art was brought about by a chain of influences. The movement, step by step, is the story of the painting—the glorious art of imagination linked with coordinated experiences. Technically, Modern Art is a natural evolution which had its origin in the Italian painting of the Early Renaissance.

One of the most important contributions of the Florentine tradition was the painting of atmosphere in aerial perspective done by Massaccio. He portrayed an actually visible atmosphere by means of light and color blended into a veil or haze. To this atmosphere, the Venetians added overtones of color and so achieved the well-recognized Venetian glow. Massaccio also was apparently the

LIBERATING OURSELVES FROM ACADEMISM

first to render realistic perspective, by which objects remote from the eye are blurred in outline. This atmospheric and aerial perspective and the blurred outlines of distant objects are seen in the works of Corot and Claude Lorraine and were utilized by the Impressionists or the early Moderns.

Another factor that contributed to the realization of Impressionism was the discovery of Leonardo da Vinci. Da Vinci had formulated laws of coloration and fully investigated atmospheric phenomena, noting the division of color tones and the fact that shadows are not black but filled with color, but he rejected his discoveries on the ground that they dissolved solidity and wrecked design. Then again, there is the discovery which Titian made with half-closed eyes, that light falling upon objects breaks up the surfaces into patches of tone. Accordingly, he began to paint broadly with patches of color in the shadows to coax into pigment the vivid illumination of nature. Titian's methods were studied in Spain by Velasquez, Goya, Rubens and Rembrandt who, with the exception of Rubens were all indoor painters. The exploration of outdoor illumination began with Courbet and Lorraine, modified by Corot of the French school and Constable and Turner of the English School and finally Manet, about the middle of the last century, founded Impressionism, to whose vitality he contributed much.

To appreciate fully Modern Art, it is necessary to revise one's method of judgement. To lose oneself in ecstasy before a Michaelangelo, or an El Greco and not to be able to appreciate a Cezanne is to manifest an ignorance of the basic spirit which animated the works of these masters. To admire the Persian and Chinese paintings for their decorative quality and be blind to the same esthetic quality in Matisse and Gauguin's works is certainly a symptom of cultural sterility. For years and years we have been schooled to admire brownish, dark, and sooty paintings of the European museums and we thought that all our paintings, in order to be called "masterpieces" must also be dark and dull in color in spite of the luminous if not blinding environment we are living in. So when we see a Modern painting which vibrates with color, light, and movement, the Academics immediately shout, "No solidity! Heretics! Lunatics!"

In this connection I should like to relate here something that happened to Constable, the English master, when he dared mix a little green color with brown to paint the grass in his pictures. His act struck consternation in the hearts of the conservative Academicians, the official artists of England. British artists heretofore had represented grass with brown paint. Therefore in all British art before Constable, grass was brown. Constable was either color-blind or a lunatic, according to the Academicians.

To save himself from being driven out of the Royal Academy, of which he was a member, and what was of more vital importance, to save himself from the possibility of being burned at stake for alleged witchcraft he led a committee of professors out to the nearest meadows, got down on his knees and with a lump of paint at the end of a stick showed them then and there, that the grass was identical with the green on the stick. The committee wagged their heads in amazement. But from that time on, grass was green except to the solemn dullards and diehards.

MOST people are uncomfortable when they are disturbed with new ideas. Many of the things we think new are not new at all. When we say that the business of the artist is to show us new things, that is, to present to us works of originality, we do not mean that it is necessary for him to explore the North Pole or the African jungle in order to find a new type of icicle or a new tropical palm. The creative artist will look at the familiar object which has met our eyes for years, and whereas we see it always in the same commonplace way, as just a chair, or an apple, or a guitar, he will show us how beautiful the thing can be if looked at it for its color, its design or other esthetic qualities it may have. Van Gogh accomplished this feat. So did Cezanne. One of the thirty paintings of the Van Gogh collection valued at one million dollars and which was being exhibited all over Paris in 1937 and is being shown all over the United States today, is that of a simple chair seen from above. Some of the famous masterpieces of Cezanne are portraits of apples, tables painted along with other kitchen accessories.

One of the Moderns' contributions to

painting is their discovery that simple objects and situations can be made esthetically moving. Here in the Philippines the observer expects the artist to describe mechanically—that is, and in a photographic way—the scene or object before him. He cannot understand why the Modernist portrays the object before him in the most simplified manner—sometimes with a distortion almost approaching abstraction as in the Matisse and Cezanne's masterpieces; neither can he comprehend the broad touches of complementary colors of Gauguin, and the pure colors placed in juxtaposition found in the paintings of Monet; and finally he is stupefied before the seemingly crazy jumble of abstract objects and lines of Picasso. And yet, curiously enough, the same observer excuses El Greco for his distortion and admires the bright and glowing colors of Titian, and the exquisite abstract design on Persian and Hindu rugs. The same basic principle which is found in the masterpieces of the best Occidental and Oriental arts is also found among the Modernists. The Modernists learned from the example of the Renaissance artists the organization of plastic forms of highly esthetic appeal by using any subject in terms of their contemporary environment. Here lies the chief difference between the Moderns and the Academics of the 18th and 19th Centuries, for whereas the Moderns produce esthetic values and sentiment in terms of their direct environment, conditioned by their funded experiences, the Academics against whom the Modern revolt was directed, tried in vain to express the same values in terms of an environment long lost in oblivion and which they experienced only vicariously. Consequently, the Academics' works lack sincerity, life, and movement, qualities that can be embodied only in masterpieces depicting objects or situations directly experienced.

SELF expression is the birthright of every artist if personality is the *sine qua non* of art. Self expression presupposes also the right of the artist to depict what interests him in the many and complicated aspects of nature, including things and situations which have for him esthetic appeal. It is this right of self expression which makes Modern creative artists differ from each other.

One of the paramount obstacles to

Henri Matisse, detail

proper appreciation of art is the undeveloped perception in the ordinary observer. Science has clearly shown that it takes much time and effort to perceive accurately and sensitively. The beholder's perceptive experiences must be equal and attuned to the artist's if we expect a work of art to be just as Bourdelle, the great French sculptor, suggests it should be, "the trysting place of the artist and the beholder; the former is lost in ecstasy in the creation, the latter being enraptured in contemplation."

Modern Art has given the Philippines a new direction. To find pleasure in the visible qualities of even the commonest object of everyday life, to use color structurally, to investigate every department of our environment which we directly experience; and to blend and integrate all of our impressions with our Oriental heritage and our traditional Christian culture—these are profound lessons with which the great Modern Art movement is inspiring our progressive artists today so that they may create masterpieces which will claim their place in the art galleries of the world.

THIS WEEK: SEPTEMBER 19, 1948

TOWARDS VIRILITY IN ART

by VICTORIO C. EDADES

(Last of a Series of Three Articles)

We have a group of Filipino painters who find their environment here a source of courage.

The influence of Oriental form is apparent in the works of contemporary European painters, as it is among the Siennese and French paintings of the 13th and 18th centuries. Thus today, the conceptual idea of art, which for hundred years dominated Chinese painting, inspires the French painter, Derain; the Persians' distortion of perspective is echoed in Matisse's masterpieces; Arabic and Moorish patterns every now and then reappear in Picasso's abstractions. And Negro and Polynesian art has given Gauguin his exotic richness and Le Corbusier, his simplicity of design.

There is a group of Filipino painters today who find this revival of Oriental form a source of courage and inspiration in their effort to create a new and more virile art. These progressive artists have taken their cue from Western masters and are turning their eyes to our own Oriental isles. The tendency of many artists and philosophers of the West to look to the East for guidance and wisdom has given our alert painters a tremendous lift. Old feelings of inferiority ingrained for four centuries of Western domination are giving way to pride and self-confidence—to the knowledge that they, by the very difference of their culture, have a unique contribution to give.

This new awareness of the richness and beauty to be found in our soil quickens their perceptions and sends them quivering to their easels, aflame with the divine urge to express their new rapture, their joy in discovering at last the gold mine that lay so long ready at hand, but unexploited.

In this luxuriant country of ours, we have the same warm sun which gave Cezanne and Van Gogh such brilliant colors; we have Igorot sculpture which rivals Negro sculpture in simplicity of design; we have the Moro color ensemble which is worthy of Gauguin's exotic palette; we have the

Ilocano weaving of verdian green and lemon yellow that would have filled Matisse with envy, and Bulacan mango trees that have the same majesty as Derain's trees; we still remember the stained glass in our churches and cathedrals which Rouault would have delighted to draw inspiration from. Our fiestas and religious processions are unique. Solutions for our social conflicts, our government's planning for rehabilitation, agrarian reforms—if our murals depicted all these, they would rival in sheer wealth of subject-matter those of Rivera and Orozco.

WHAT a mine of material lies ready for any Filipino painter who has the guts to renounce the usual sentimental delineation of pretty girls and namby-pamby men! What a wonderful opportunity lies before our government officials and educators to teach our youth the proper appreciation of the arts and their function in society. What a wonderful opportunity awaits our rich people to serve their country by pensioning talented, but poor, students of architecture, painting, sculpture, wood carving, rattan and bamboo crafts, furniture and interior designing and other handicrafts!

Today there are progressive Filipino architects and painters who remain true to their inner vision in spite of ridicule and general indifference. With the reforming zeal of priests or saints these artists are forcing to the forefront the issue of vitalizing the Philippine art world.

Conspicuous among the progressive painters are Carlos V. Francisco, Cesar Legaspi, Hernando R. Ocampo, Galo B. Ocampo, Diosdado Lorenzo, Vicente Manansala, D. Diego, R. Puruganan, Cristobal, Anita Magsaysay, J. Pardo; and among the younger ones we see Elizalde Navarro, Virginia Ty, Rafael Asuncion and Jose Lagniton.

Carlos Francisco left the U.P. School of Fine Arts when he lacked only a few subjects for graduation. Academic training with all its rigid rules and attendant deadening influences could not interest young Francisco any longer. Communing with the Moderns in search of his own soul, he came to know Cezanne, Gauguin and Diego Rivera. Gauguin's works fascinated him. For the last ten years he

has painted furiously and unremittingly, and, what is more important, has engaged likewise in hard thinking. Self-analysis and self-criticism have become the obsession of his life.

Along with Francisco came Galo B. Ocampo, fresh from the graduation exercised at the U.P. School of Fine Arts. Carlos and Galo have had violent, all-night discussions on art in general—and on the merits of Modern Art in particular. To their enthusiastic sessions came be-medaled Cesar Legaspi, also of the U.P. School of Fine Arts. Discussions occurred in coffee shops, offices, and on sidewalks. While this group dissected design, lines, forms, and the structural functions of color, a fellow painter experimented on design, pure and simple, using as subject matter the poor sprawling on the streets and sidewalks; beggars, naked to the waist—begging, eating, or resting. This was Hernando R. Ocampo. Soon Diosdado Lorenzo arrived from Italy, reinforcing the group. These five are important branches of the Philippine tree of Modern Art which was planted 20 years ago. Today the number of Modern Artists in the Philippines is fast increasing, for many of our students here and abroad are now alive to the influence of the great Moderns who went before, and those who are still with us. Students "go Modern" in spite of their academic teachers. As Dali remarked a few months ago, "Why try to be modern? You paint modern art in spite of yourself."

Carlos V. Francisco is perhaps the most popular mural painter in the Philippines today. His murals recapture the spirit of the Chinese paintings which are "flat and yet very deep." Francisco has discarded the traditional method of Western artists, of painting from one and only one point of view, or station point. He distorts space in the same way that the Chinese and the Persians of the 12th Century distorted space in their works. Figures and objects in the distance are painted on top of the canvas and of the same size as those in the foreground, thus achieving the effect of tapestry. But what is perhaps most appealing to the public, and what accounts for Francisco's popularity, is his rich color scheme, a decided influence of the Moros. For compact design and for sensuous charm of vibrating colors one should see Francisco's "Angelus" and "Caingin."

Unlearning much of his five-year training in an academic school, Cesar Legaspi emerges one of our hard-working and active members of the progressive group. At the last exhibition of the Art Association of the Philippines, where Cesar Legaspi won the fourth prize, one visitor who was standing before the artist's "Sick Child" remarked, "Huh, this painter Legaspi does not know how to draw!"

Of course, what the observer meant, and what every Academic means by correct drawing, is copying mechanically and photographically. The visitor, of course, did not know who Legaspi was; he did not know that Legaspi, if he wants to, can easily copy anything with the preciseness of a camera. Did he not win several medals at the U.P. Fine Arts School for his detailed reproduction of ancient works? But in his painting, "The Sick Child," the artist preoccupies himself with simple straight lines as contrasted with circular patterns, crimson against green—and the subject-matter is incidental.

LEGASPI uses poor people for his models, for these are the people he moves around with—the people he knows and loves. To the sophisticated these poor people have too-wide mouths and uncouth appearances and, therefore, are not the types usually associated with paintings. Many Filipinos believe that in order to produce masterpieces, the artist should depict pretty girls, handsome men, and "grand and noble" subjects such as the Greeks used to paint.

Like all other Moderns, Hernando Ocampo turns to ordinary people for his subject matter. He differs in some respects from his Filipino contemporaries. At times he paints objects or parts of objects for the sheer delight of creating color harmony. The objects become to him only a means to an end. And because of his preoccupation with this goal of achieving an abstract color combination, the figures and objects he introduces are often reduced to abstract lines, planes and masses.

He secures rhythm by repeating, varying, counterbalancing, or contrasting each of the plastic elements—like line, color, and space—all over the canvas. His color scheme is usually made up of contrasts, such as vivid green, and crimson. By this means he achieves a

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striking canvas that far transcends the usual monochrome works of our Academic painters of today.

Those who are familiar with the works of the many artists who change the natural shape of an object in order to fit it into the pattern they want to create, can readily see a similar purpose in Hernando Ocampo's works. The easiest way to understand this particular method of distortion is to examine closely the designs of exquisite Persian and Chinese rugs. The objects are "stylized" for the sake of good design and in order to suit the material. In our everyday life we see many abstract designs of women's dresses, curtains and table covers. If one examines these abstract designs, he will find that they are derived from leaves, flowers, fruits, trees, and human figures,—from all conceivable objects we come in contact within our daily life.

Galo B. Ocampo is both a painter and an art critic. His paintings show a decided influence of Oriental flatness similar to that of the Hindu and Chinese rugs. He is like Francisco in that he is also fond of the complementary colors of the Moros—vivid green contrasting with crimson, red with blue and black, yellow with violet. Galo Ocampo's linear patterns are much more simple than those of Carlos Francisco, and, therefore, more satisfying. His "The Moro Dance" in the Vargas Collection is one of his best. In this painting, a highly decorative quality is achieved through the distortion of space, making the figures appear to be on one plane so that the painting is like a tapestry. The same quality is found in his mural at the main stairway of the University of Sto. Tomas.

Galo Ocampo's writings on Modern Art and Modern artists in the Philippines are doing, and will do, much to emancipate young artists from Academicism. His broadsides against the obsolete methods of instruction in his alma mater have made him persona non-grata to his former instructors but they have contributed not a little toward the now-improved curriculum of that institution.

Diosdado Lorenzo arrived from Italy in time to reinforce the vitality of the *avant-garde* painters in the Islands. Lorenzo uses color and light in broad areas. He applies his paint with obvious brush-strokes, making his works

vibrate with life. There is airiness and luminosity in his landscapes. Some of his portraits abroad were executed with much economy of means, a profound lesson learned from Manet. If his paintings abroad were characterized by the predominance of cool colors, his painting today show the warmth of our tropical atmosphere.

Ricarte Puruganan's works during the Occupation showed an improvement in power and movement over his earlier, ethereal landscapes with their greenish blue color scheme. His lines and masses in his later works are becoming more dynamic than any he has ever done before.

Manansala's case is similar. His present dynamic compositions augur a bright future for the young artist. Although grey and austere, his color scheme is not lacking in richness. His "Banaklaot," which won for him the second prize at the exhibition of the AAP, is noteworthy for its arresting, diagonal composition.

Bonifacio Cristobal returned home from Paris when the War broke out. His portrait of an old woman with a rosary shows excellent characterization. His color is cool and rich.

Demetrio Diego excels in linear pattern and in rhythmic repose as against Carlos Francisco's lyrical movement. Most of Diego's canvases are compositions in cool colors which are subtly varied, pleasing and satisfying.

WHILE the progressive painters of this country differ in their technique and present varied forms of composition, they seem to be alike in one respect, and that is: They prefer as subjects the simple folks of the farm and of the crowded cities. They have learned from Rembrandt, Vermeer, Velasquez and the great Moderns that ordinary objects and simple situations can be made esthetically moving.

This idea of painting the common *tao* and such ordinary subject as a chair, an apple, etc. arouses the ire of Mr. Tolentino and his fellow-academic sculptor, F. W. Ruckstull. Both Tolentino and Ruckstull have enjoined the Filipino Moderns to follow the footsteps of the Greeks, by citing Plato and Aristotle's esthetics.

Tolentino and Ruckstull fail to realize the true function of esthetics, or the

philosophy of the beautiful. "Aesthetic theory is a branch of philosophy, and exists for the sake of knowledge and not as a guide to practice. . . . The aesthetic theorist in short, desires to understand the artist, not in order to interfere with the latter, but in order to satisfy an intellectual interest of his own. . . . Aesthetics is not designed, as many suppose, to instruct the artist in his creative work; nor to set down rigid standards to which all art must conform."

Has not Mr. Tolentino learned the very elementary fact in the history of art that for 20,000 years before Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the founders of Greek esthetics, were born, Spanish, Egyptian, Chinese, Babylonian, Phoenician and early Greek artists created works of art that are still objects of wonder today? Does not Mr. Tolentino realize that had the Christian artists of the Medieval Era followed exactly the Greek esthetics, there would be no Byzantine art or Romanesque and Gothic masterpieces for him to marvel at? What a great loss to the world if we did not have the magnificent cathedrals of Paris, Cologne, Chartres, Amiens and Rheims with their wonderful stained glass windows and innumerable architectonic sculptures!

Similarly, if the Oriental artists had followed the Greek formula of beauty, then the world would have been deprived of the great artistic contributions of the Chinese, the Persians, the Japanese and the Hindus!

The great obstacle to the progress of art appreciation in this country is not so much the fact that the masses are ignorant and illiterate in things artistic as it is the predominance of academic minds among the mentors of our youth. The ignorance of the masses can be overcome through proper instruction in our schools, but the closed minds of teachers who refuse to see the truth, can perpetuate false ideas of art.

THIS WEEK: SEPTEMBER 26, 1948

Court Beauty
Painter unknown, Ch'ing dynasty (1644 - 1912)

MODERN ART

by G. E. TOLENTINO

The following article by Guillermo E. Tolentino the sculptor, is in answer to V. C. Edades' recent article on Modern Art in this Magazine. The author is a ranking faculty member of the U.P. School of Fine Arts and is recognized as a leading exponent of "classical" art in the Philippines.

MUCH controversy has risen among artists, students of art and even the general public due to the recent exhibition of paintings held by the Art Association of the Philippines. Modern Art is now the principal topic of conversation among art lovers. Many have supported it and many are against it. A lot has been said in favor of Modern Art in the press, by Modern artists.

However, up to the present nothing has been said about the classical art. Even the students in the School of Fine Arts of the University of the Philippines are somewhat bewildered and have approached me about the matter. Because of their insistence I am compelled to answer their queries, which I believe are also the same questions that many laymen would ask.

Professor, they ask me, will you give us your opinion on modern art? Some of us students seem to like it, you know.

Willingly. I am glad that you are interested in things modern.

Why, Professor, do you like modern art, too?

Yes I do, but I also like the ancient and primitive art.

We do not understand. You are a conservative, how come that you like this modern art?

Not so fast. Anything done in this atomic age is modern.

But the works of our faculty are not modern but academic, classical or conservative.

Very true, in a way. Still we are all Modern. Don't you know the meaning of the words Academic, Classical

and Modern? Academic - as the dictionary defines it, is scholarly; classical. Classical - *of or pertaining to the highest class or rank. Modern - pertaining to the present period; not ancient; common.*

The ancient Greek and Roman artists did not call themselves ancient artists during their own era, but modern. So we of this modern age are all modern.

We do not mean it that way. We mean the modern paintings that were exhibited recently at the National Museum in the Institute of Science Building by the Art Association of the Philippines.

Oh, I see. I do not like those distorted paintings and I am of the opinion that they should not be shown to children or women in the family way. There is no beauty in those paintings at all.

They say that modernists or extremists in Europe and America are very successful and their works are being bought by art collectors and museums.

That is true. But I may cite the famous expression of Abraham Lincoln — "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time."

But they are not fooling or cheating the people.

Of course not. They are serious — that is what they think.

But the people who buy their works have money, and are intelligent too!

That does not mean that they really like modern art. They only follow the trend of the moment. Of course some of them are of the same category as the artists themselves.

How do you like modern architecture? They also ask me.

Oh, I reply, that is different. It is very pleasing to the eye. There are no distortions but harmony of lines and colors, no dark spooky nooks but brightness and gaiety. I adore modern architecture. I admire highly the modern architect. I like modern music, modern ballet, the New Look and all streamline utilities as well.

How is it that you like all these mod-

ern things and abhor modern painting and sculpture?

Modern architects and modern composers, like all other creators of modern utilities, spend long years of continuous study and research before they create new lovely things to please the people. They follow certain rules that cannot be distorted. Gardeners and interior decorators have the same aim.

By the way, you mention interior decorator — do you like decorative arts?

Of course, they decorate or adorn the walls. They are just like precious ornaments.

How about modern poetry?

Just as unruly as modern painting and modern sculpture.

Why unruly — we do not understand.

Here is the skeleton or framework of all the Fine arts: Artistic anatomy, pictorial perspective, drawing, harmony of tones and colors, balance, grace rhythm, meter, rhyme and the soul of the composition. Without these the products cannot be classified as Fine Arts but Abstract, Bizarre and Insane Arts.

Do you think Director Amorsolo and the rest of the faculty members of the School of Fine Arts and other classical artists on the outside would someday follow the steps of the modernists?

Certainly not!

Do you prefer to remain 200 years behind, as the modernists say?

We are not behind at all. The ancient classical artists were not "behind." We are apace with the time. The distortionists, mutilators and deformists of the human form, on the other hand, are the ones behind for their art is worse than the primitive.

I do not think so, Professor. From what we have read in an article by Professor Edades in (THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE, July 18) showing the family tree of modern art, we think the author was correct in his assertions.

I have read the same article and saw the family tree that you refer to.

Nike of Samothrace
Hellenistic Period (c. 200 - 900 B.C.)

What do you say about that?

That is the worst upside-down caricature of the truth. Have you ever seen any family tree that began from the most perfect stage and ended in horrible imperfection? Compare that modernistic family tree to the family tree of the human race. The latter begins from the protoplasm and ends in the masterpiece of God—Man. Take the family tree of a great man, Jose Rizal's for instance. His great great ancestors were simple, illiterate people. After long centuries of continuous evolution the tree ends in the person of Rizal, the embodiment of all good things you could think of. But start from the principal root, Velasquez, the giant, the master, the greatest realist, colorist and draftsman of all times—and end into nameless mutilators, deformists of the form—that is that author is the family tree of modern art! What sacrilege! Is that comparison clear enough?

Very clear, Professor.

THE aim of the ancient masters was to transfer beauty and perfection in nature to their works of art. This is precisely the aim of contemporary classical artists. To attain the nearest approach to beauty and perfection, you have to spend the best part of your youth in the scientific and continuous study of drawing, modeling, color rendering, harmony of lines and tones, compositions, the nude, perspective, and artistic anatomy dealing mostly with the outside form of the human figure, the functions of the muscles and bones, the proportions and types of different races and individuals, poise, expression, etc. That is why (I tell the students) you are here to study all these things, so as to open your eyes and be guided to acquire real good taste in things beautiful in art—that which we call aesthetics. Other works of art that do not possess the quality to please the onlookers are just the opposite—they are anti-aesthetic. Art works from the dawn of history to the present time, possess the characteristics and temperaments of the artists. Just like one's handwriting which shows clearly the character of the writer. He may be lazy, untidy, neat, nervous, bold, deceitful, hot-tempered, etc. Let us take Velasquez, for instance. He like real things, so he painted real things. He was the greatest realist of all times. Murillo, his teacher, was very religious

and painted religious subjects. Even the children playing in the street, when transferred on his canvasses, appear angelic. Raphael, so young and so handsome, painted in characteristic manner. Michaelangelo, ugly with his broken nose, was muscular, hot tempered, and brave. All his figures, even women and children, either in painting or sculpture, are all muscular and athletic. Our great Juan Luna was bold, fearless, strong. These traits are reflected in his works. Hidalgo, his contemporary, was musical, poetic, romantic, and mystical. These, too, are clearly shown in his paintings. Fernando Amorsolo is docile, sweet, friendly, frank, faithful, a great lover of things beautiful, a King Midas of the brush. Even the ugliest abstract things, when transferred on his canvasses, become attractive and desirable. His paintings decorate the walls of the rich and the wise, and of collectors and museums throughout the world. Even the lowly people treasure lithographic reproductions of his beautiful paintings. So, you see, the character, attainment and taste of the artists are reflected in their works, not only in the preparation of each one's favorite subject but also in their personal technique and style. Technique and style do not count so much to the general public which is concerned only with the agreeable and beautiful in paintings and sculptures. It wants relaxation and contentment in admiring works of art, for the Fine Arts are a recreation and not torment of the soul.

Therefore (says my interrogators) since you have stated that the character, the manner of thinking, the peculiarities of the artist are reflected in his works, does it follow that distorted works are products of distorted minds? Probably.

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GALO'S OTHER VIEWS

by EMELYN G. ADVINCULA

(Re-printed with the permission of Zone-D Publications. Ms. Emelyn G. Advincula and Ms. Marilen M. Perfecto were Dr. Rod Paras-Perez' student assistants at the University of the Philippines. Their interviews came out in a small monograph on Galo B. Ocampo, 1973.)

What were the issues you raised or defended in your writings concerning the controversy?

I concentrated my attack on the "Academism" in the U.P. School of Fine Arts. What I meant by this was the curriculum it offered. It was lacking in the academic aspect needed to develop the intellect of the students. The totality of the artist lies in his creativity—his intellectual capacity. What is developed then is only the skill and craftsmanship. All for four years. And you only get a Certificate.

What are your ideas on the effectivity of Modern Art? What attracted you to it?

Modern Art was new and novel. There was no required academic experience. Most of the modern artists didn't know how to draw in the same manner as Amorsolo, yet they were creative. Although, some of them just went along with the movement to publish their names. I detest this type of artists who seek only publicity. I'm against the "society painters" hobnobbing with society, painting only for the elite. Art should not be a means to something—to fame. The merit of the work is what counts.

You were part of the "Triumvirate" which sparked the Modern Art Propaganda Movement—what were the circumstances which led to its forming?

Actually, it was the Philippine press who gave us the name "triumvirate"...I was the first artist to be attracted to Edades. Edades brought something new and sensible and it appealed to me. Edades came to know me through my writings and befriended me. Botong (Carlos Francisco), who was my buddy in college, and I banded together with Edades to form the so-called Triumvirate. We wanted to attract younger artists to join the movement. We did murals together and exhibited them. But my greatest contribution to the group was my ideas. I was the most vocal of the three.