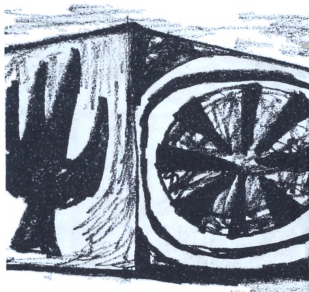


# FILIPINO

By Arturo Rogerio Luz

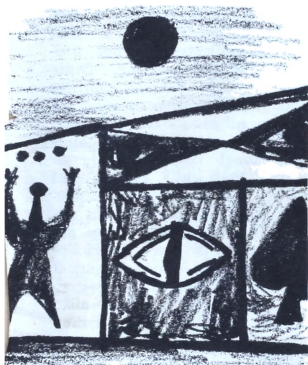
**W**HAT DO WE mean by Filipino painting? A painting by Filipino, a Philippine theme painted by any painter, or do we mean a Philippine theme painted by a Filipino painter? Again: When a Filipino painter paints a foreign theme or subject, does he produce Filipino painting or is he merely a Filipino painter painting? And when a foreign painter paints a Philippine theme or subject, does he produce Filipino painting or is he merely a painter painting a Filipino theme or subject?

Filipino painters have painted and are painting native and foreign subjects, in local and foreign surroundings. Luna and Hidalgo painted foreign themes and subjects and are said to have produced Filipino painting. Others before them copied saints, depicted religious themes



and painted foreign subjects. They are remembered not only as Filipino painters but as the grandparents of Filipino painting. And there are painters who have also painted, and are painting, native themes in local surroundings: Igorots, the planting and harvesting and pounding of rice, the nipa hut and the barong-barong. The works of Luna and Hidalgo, and those before them, may or may not be considered Filipino

# PAINTING



painting, but not because the theme is foreign. Paintings of Igorots, the nipa hut and barong-barongs may or may not become Filipino painting, but not because the subject is native. The use of native themes or subjects does not necessarily produce Filipino painting, any more than the use of borrowed themes or subjects will always produce foreign painting.

Gauguin was a French painter who lived and painted in Ta-

hiti, and who married a Tahitian. But Gauguin did not produce Tahitian art by painting Tahiti, any more than by marrying a native could he have made himself a Tahitian.

A Chinese painter painting a New York skyline will not produce American painting, but might produce a painting of a New York skyline, a Chinese painting of a New York skyline, or simply a Chinese painting.

A painting by Hernando Ocampo was at one time awarded a prize for being the most representative Filipino painting among many other paintings. Yet the painting was abstract and the symbols, universal.

**L**UNA, HIDALGO and others since then have painted and are painting foreign themes and subjects, and have some-

times produced Filipino painting. And other painters have painted and are painting native themes and subjects, but do not always produce Filipino painting, only paintings of Philippine themes by Filipino painters. And a few painters have painted and are painting native and foreign subjects, and have sometimes produced Filipino painting. For in the term Filipino painting is clearly, or perhaps hopefully, implied a body of paintings that, irrespective of content or form, and without recourse to the accidents of geography or nationality, is yet representative of the native character or spirit.

From time to time Filipinos indulge in intense, if misdirected, nationalism. At such times the tendency has been to pronounce as foreign anything acquired instead of inherited, and to condemn as evil anything that is borrowed. In painting this has often resulted in a hasty reexamination of existing forms and a rejection of anything even remotely foreign. This is accompanied by a frantic search for purely native forms and motifs, supposedly inherited and uninfluenced. Invariably the search ends with the rediscovery of Igorot and Moro forms and motifs, ancient Tagalog script and indigenous fauna and flora. These are used, more or less arbitrarily, to disguise otherwise con-

ventional paintings, masquerading as True Filipino Painting. While these cannot be denied as being native subjects, neither can they be accepted as the only native subjects, nor taken to be the only requisites to Filipino painting.

This is not to suggest that Filipino painters should not paint native themes, or that native subjects will not produce Filipino painting. Quite the contrary. Filipino painters should paint native subjects, for native subjects have produced and will produce Filipino painting, though not necessarily always. For while Igorots and palms and carabaos are undeniably Philippine subjects, typical native subjects, they are not necessarily the only Philippine subjects. The danger, if any, in limiting ourselves to the hut and palm and carabao is not so much because they are not Philippine subjects, which they are, but because these are often mistaken to be the only true Philippine subjects, which of course they are not. There is a tendency among many painters to rely on these native elements as leading inevitably to Filipino painting. At the same time few, if any, seem to realize that Filipinos are not necessarily Igorots or Moros or barefooted natives but can also be Manileños who like to wear shoes and prefer palm-beach suits to g-strings

and would rather go about in automobiles; that the Philippines is not made up entirely of palm-filled islands infested with carabaos in an eternal sunset; that the carretela is no more native than the jeepney and that Moro art and life and custom is no more Filipino than it is Hindu or Mohammedan; that we are part Chinese and Indian, Spanish and Indonesian and in many ways American, in speech and manner and custom, and certainly in art.

**A** NATIONAL ART or expression stems from tradition, or it grows from influences. Many influences acquired from different sources over a long period of time, absorbed and altered by native use and manner and custom, slowly assuming a unique and particular form or character until these are completely assimilated into the native culture, in time becoming the native tradition.

There is yet not tradition in Filipino painting, only painters painting in a foreign manner or style or tradition. We have painters painting in the classic and academic Western tradition. And we have painters painting in the contemporary styles or manner, in the contemporary French or American or Mexican manner. But not in the Filipino manner, for there is yet no distinct Filipino style or tradition, only Filipino

painters painting in a foreign manner or style or tradition.

If we have therefore produced, or are producing Filipino painting, we have produced it painting in a foreign style or tradition, and not necessarily using native subjects. We have produced, or are producing, Filipino painting by painting saints and fields and dalagas, huts and fruits and buildings, leaves and shapes and color. And we have painted these either in the Western tradition, in the contemporary international styles, or sometimes in the manner of a Klee or Matisse or Tamayo. Never in the native tradition, not in the Filipino style or manner yet sometimes, perhaps, in the Filipino spirit, that indefinable, intangible blend of diverse cultures and backgrounds and qualities. For how else can one account for that quality in a Manansala, which can be in any one of many styles and bearing the trace of many sources yet sometimes, oftentimes uniquely, curiously Filipino? Or how else explain the Filipinism in Ocampo 'who paints in the international style, in the abstract and non-representational manner yet succeeds, as no other Filipino painter, in reflecting the native heat and vitality and color?

Filipino painting does not stem from tradition, but from influences: malayan-oriental

traits deeply ingrained in the native character and, more recently, occidental influences no less, if not possibly more, a part of native culture and expression. If it is therefore to our malayan-oriental origin that we can ultimately attribute that native element that spirit or quality in native art or expression, it is to the occidental cultures that we owe our whole background in painting. The Filipino painter is native by birth, European-American by training or tradition, partly Mohammedan or Spanish or Chinese or Indian or American, in heritage and manner and custom. And not any one of these, but all. If we have produced, or are producing, Filipino painting it is only because the native element, our innate

and inherited traits and forms have combined, or are combining, with all the acquired oriental-occidental cultures and has formed, or is slowly forming, an art or expression which is neither occidental nor oriental, at the same time both—but which must ultimately be distinct, unique and Filipino.

It may have failed to define the native element or more closely examine Filipino painting. But if I have succeeded in suggesting what Filipino painting is not, or what the native spirit or quality could be, that is good enough. For as one painter suggested: no one should define Filipino painting, for there is yet no Filipino painting, only paintings by Filipinos.

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### Evidence

Early in his career, young Clarence Darrow was defending a difficult case against an older attorney who loftily referred to Darrow as "that beardless youth."

When Darrow's turn came, he addressed the court as follows:

"My worthy opponent seems to condemn me for not having a beard. Let me reply with a story. The king of Spain once dispatched a youthful nobleman to the court of a neighboring king, who received him with this outraged complaint: 'Does the King of Spain lack men, that he sends me a beardless boy?'

"To which the young ambassador replied: 'Sire, if my King had supposed that you imputed wisdom to a bear, he would have sent a goat.'"

Darrow won the case.