

ART

Saprid's murals in metal

Nothing short of phenomenal is the rise of Solomon Saprid to the front rank of contemporary Philippine sculpture in the last three years. It started with the commission for the Gomburza Monument, won in a 1970 competition in which all Filipino sculptors of note participated. Since then Saprid has become the country's leading mural sculptor. After the death of Carlos V. Francisco, a critic observed, Saprid is in fact carrying on in metal what the genius of Angono did with oil and canvas.

Saprid's works in beaten bronze or copper decorate the lobbies of several banks in Manila and Makati. The latest is a pair of murals, each 40 feet long, for the new Central Bank building on Roxas Boulevard. At present the sculptor is working on the design for another major commission which is to be finished by the middle of the year.

As "Botong" Francisco turned, not too frequently, to easel pictures when not executing murals, so Saprid does less ambitious works in between the big ones. In this respect he is more prolific than Francisco. All told, his output in the last few years has been really prodigious. His works are in continuous demand by architects and builders who appreciate their richness of execution to offset austere modern interiors. This has not prevented Saprid from producing small-size sculpture in high relief for numerous homes and offices, figures in the round for lawns and gardens, or life-size statues in a variety of motifs ranging from the religious to the



'The Fruits of Labor': a detail of the mural at the Far East Bank & Trust Co.

paganistic.

As if all this were not enough, he potters around his studio, in a rambling house in San Francisco del Monte, with bits of metal which he shapes into unique objects that could serve equally well as paper-weights, door knockers, conversation pieces, and what not. Recent diversissements include miniature carvings in ivory, perhaps to be framed in silver or worked into the skull of a hornbill or some other curio prized by his collector friends.

When not occupied with institutional art, Saprid is free to indulge his propensity to surrealism, endowing conventional subjects with overtones of the religious, the erotic or the occult. Signs of the Zodiac lend themselves particularly well to this purpose, and Saprid exploits them to the



Saprid in his workshop.

limit.

But the subject which has become his virtual trade-mark is the Tikbalang, the centaur of the Philippine "lower mythology" symbolizing male power. Saprid has woven many variations around this theme, of which the most notable so far is a statue on one of the squares in the Makati commercial center.

Saprid's art may have been saved from sterility, after its beginnings in religious themes, by its entry into the realm of mythology and folklore. He has done his share of Resurrections and Last Suppers and now draws more from myth and history for inspiration. An academic person (master's degree in Communications, leading faculty member in one of the Manila universities) until a few years ago, Saprid is no stranger to research and scholarship.

It was a former neighbor, painter Vicente Manansala, who revived Saprid's artistic ambitions after remaining dormant for many years. Saprid had spent a term at the prewar School of Fine Arts, University of the Philippines, but later found the academic life more rewarding. He was nearing his 50th year when Manansala literally threw a piece of wood at his feet and dared him to sculpt it if he had not yet forgotten his earlier ambition. That, Saprid now remembers with gratitude, was how he got started.

After winning three major awards in two sculpture exhibitions in 1968, he had his first one-man show the next year. Then came the Gomburza commission, and Saprid the sculptor was fully and securely launched. He resigned his teaching post to devote himself entirely to art. Like H. R. Ocampo and Cesar Legaspi, who also left high-paying jobs in middle age to paint full time, Saprid has had no cause to regret his decision.

E. AGUILAR CRUZ

BOOKS

Guide to the Bible

POINTING THE WAY
by Martin Buber
A Harper Torchbook

In this book *Pointing The Way* are essays by the German Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, who died in 1965. Says Maurice Friedman, the translator of the essays into English: "(there is a) growing importance in the English-speaking world both of Buber's works and his life. Today Martin Buber is recognized as one of the great contemporary philosophers." Says Reinhold Niebuhr: "the publication of Martin Buber's *I And Thou* a quarter of a century ago was a great event in the religious life of the West."

Each essay is on a different subject, and the reader is advised to read only one essay in one sitting. This book review will concentrate on the third and last section, namely "Politics, Community, and Peace."

In this third section Martin Buber analyzes and criticizes "modern" western society, which to the Asian reader might be difficult to understand. Buber often begins a sentence with "we." What does "we" mean?

"We" is "the Jewish people" or "Jerusalem" or "Israel" and Martin Buber is no longer talking as a philosopher nor as an individual, but as one of the Jewish nation. And whenever he talks as one of the Jewish nation, he has left philosophy behind.

Probably the most important essay is "Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour," which is impossible to summarize. It is true biblical criticism to help the Bible reader who has been floundering around in the New Testament. Buber explains the distinction between the prophets and the apocalyptic writings. The prophets' cry was always the same: "turn," or "return!" often translated in English as "repent! ", while in the apocalyptic writings, the end of all history is near and there is a coming age in which there will be a transformation of all things. In the apocalyptic writings, therefore, it is a process that cannot be arrested. But in the message of the prophets of Israel, there is "a living historical dialogue of divine and human actions." To the prophets of Israel, the turning is "not a return to an earlier, guiltless stage of life, but a swinging round to where the wasted hither-and-thither becomes walking on a way, and guilt is atoned for in the newly-arisen genuineness of existence."

It is not surprising that Martin Buber has been counted among the existential philosophers. And, in fact, he has somewhere a commentary on Kierkegaard's relation between Abra-

ham and God.

In the last paragraph of "The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle" he again talks of a group who may have to come to the rescue "in the hour when the catastrophe sends in advance its final warning," but he does not identify them here; he merely says: "those who stand on the cross-front will have to come to the rescue." He adds, "They who have in common the language of human truth must then unite to attempt in common at last to give to God what is God's."

In "A Letter to Gandhi" (written in 1939) he explains to someone who does not know anything about the Jews what it means to be a Jew. In the course of the explanation, he also touches on the Arab and Jew conflict and Palestine.

Martin Buber was in Germany during the beginning of the great persecution of the Jews. He was brought to Palestine. He taught at Hebrew University. Among his works are: *Two Types of Faith, A Believing Humanism, and Eclipse of God*. He and his friend Franz Rosenzweig worked together on a translation of the Hebrew Bible into German in such a way as to preserve the original spokenness of the Hebrew (from a note by Maurice Friedman). Dag Hammarskjold nominated him for a Nobel Prize in Literature. He is listed as a writer on Jewish life and religion by Schocken Books who, sponsored by the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations,

published *Tradition and Contemporary Experience* in 1970.

Within the past ten years, there have been efforts made to consolidate Jadaeo-Christian unity. Jewish intellectuals, many of them rabbis, are teaching in American universities.

Scholars and philosophers have been trying to pierce the mystery of the life of Jesus. Martin Buber mentions him several times while the authors of the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* present the moral problems of Judas.

Judah and Israel used to be one nation. Ten tribes broke away and called themselves Israel. The two tribes that were left called themselves Judah. The people of Judah never let go of their language or of their identity: they were called "Jews" from the name "Judah." The ten tribes of Israel, however, forgot their identity as children of Israel, they forgot who they were, they strayed from the faith of Israel, and became "lost sheep." They were captured by the Assyrians and migrated with the Assyrians. Jesus said he came to find "the lost sheep." Also he is quoted as telling his followers, "go to the ten tribes."

The Jews had no chance to worry about what had happened to their brothers, the ten lost tribes. Jesus put himself through trouble and agony, even appearing as a traitor to his own nation, to "get the message across" to them, to the lost tribes who didn't even know who they were.

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