

## PAINTINGS

CARLOS V. FRANCISCO

## RP's greatest mural painter

A painter who lived in comparative seclusion in his native town lived to find himself hailed as a national artist. After his death at the age of 57 four years ago — on March 31, 1969, to be exact — it seemed only a matter of time for his achievement to receive well-deserved official recognition.

Carlos V. Francisco, who had no higher ambition than to portray on canvas the life of simple folk in the little town of Angono, Rizal, became almost in spite of himself his country's greatest mural painter.

The City of Manila is the proud possessor of his grandest work, the saga of the Philippines from the perspective of the metropolis, which grew from a barangay by the river Pasig into a Malayan Kingdom before the Western tide of exploration and conquest reached these shores.

It was not for nothing that the eulogies at the artist's funeral praised him as a nationalist as well as a man of art. For his murals were the counterpart in art of the histories of the Philippines written through Filipino eyes by historians like Teodoro A. Agoncillo.

The first such mural by Francisco was painted for an exposition held on the Luneta. In retrospect it can be seen for what it was — a rehearsal, so



Kaingin: prize-winning work of Carlos V. Francisco.

to speak, for greater works to come. An indication of the official neglect of the arts at the time is the fact that this mural was later cut up to facilitate its storage and then left to the mercy of the elements. Nothing has been heard

of it since and it is presumed to have perished.

From that lost painting, however, Francisco's career as virtually our official muralist started. Commissions for public buildings as well as private

residences kept the artist busy. Material remuneration was still meager even by standards current at the time. But Francisco was made, and his fame rose beyond the highest expectations of the former magazine illustrator whose heart was really in easel paintings and occasional murals depicting barrio life, specifically the barrio life in his native Angono, as it had not been depicted before.

The easel paintings of Francisco tend to be overshadowed by his bigger works. Yet they show the artist's talent, his personality and lyric passion better than anything else.

It was one of these paintings which raised him from comparative obscurity to fame when, in 1948, it was awarded first prize in the first annual exhibition of the Art Association of the Philippines. Demetrio Diego and Vicente Manansala, who also had first attracted notice as illustrators, won the second and third prizes, respectively.

This prize-winning work, variously titled "Kaingin" and "Pastoral" among other names by reviewers, starts the regular art feature of THE REPUBLIC. It is the same subject that an Amorsolo or a Castaneda might have painted. But whereas traditionalists would have emphasized pictorial realism, Francisco has sacrificed it to dynamic composition and solidity of forms.

It was an art learned with much groping from Cezanne, through imperfect color prints and with early guidance from Victorio C. Edades, pioneer of contemporary Philippine painting. Botong — as Francisco is affectionately called — had never seen and was never to see Cezanne in the original, but he understood and his intelligence and dedication supplied the rest. With this foundation he went on to create on his own and to become one of our most original artists.

E. AGUILAR CRUZ



Manila City Hall mural: history depicted in oil by Francisco.