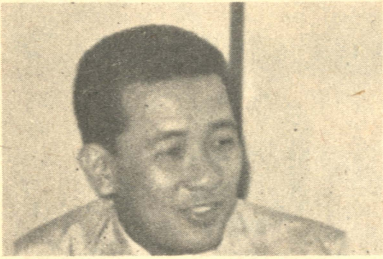




Cartoons and Characters

MALANG



THE history of Philippine comics probably will not start with Mauro "Malang" Santos but the high points of its development would be incomplete without citing Malang's contributions.

Comics was moribund business and an unexciting art-form until the early '50s when a group of young cartoonists led by Malang and Larry Alcala started building a legion of comic fans with their witty and better-drawn cartoons. Starting in the vernacular magazines, the young cartoonists eventually parted ways: Alcala went to the monthly comicbooks, Malang switched to editorial journalism.

Of this group, Malang was easily acknowledged "Chairman of the Board." He was more prolific, more popular. His gift was that he had a better feel of the social pulse, he was aware of his time. While others were falling back on hoary comic situations, Malang was mining from the rich code of human experience, from the foibles of modern man in a complex society. Among the products of this sensitivity were *Kosme the Cop* and *Chaingang Charlie*. His full-page "crowd" cartoons were further samples of his outlook.

Recognition of the Filipino talent in

cartoons came with the publication of Malang's *Charlie* in *Pageant Magazine*, the mini-*Playboy* magazine. *Asia Magazine* later joined the chorus and reprinted his works. *El Mundo Español* pinned another badge on the Malang label by running *Kosme*.

And there were other awards: First Prize, Cartooning, AAP Annual Competition, 1956, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963 and 1964 (six times); First Prize, Water Color Division, AAP Annual Competition, 1961; Grand Award for Editorial Design, ADCP, for the years 1958, 1960, 1962 and 1964 (four times); and the "Artist of the Year" award from SPIC in 1964. The crowning award however, for Malang's artistic talent came when he was chosen as one of the country's Ten Outstanding Young Men (TOYM) in 1963.

The TOYM award is another story. It represents the other Malang, one with greater creativity. And here again is another footnote to the development of the Filipino cartoonist: from a comic strip illustrator to artist. Malang broke the ground, blazed the trail. He was to be followed by Yonzon, Ragodon, Cabrera, Asuncion. Again, he towered over his peers. A Malang exhibit was always a commercial success.

Malang the artist's early works were picturesque and posterous. They had appeal, were executed with care and with an eye for details, but they left the artistic eye unsatisfied. For a while Malang the artist could not quite shake off the label of Malang the cartoonist.

He had his critics staring at his late paintings. The colors were less glossy, the lines less flamboyant. A richer, deeper texture crowned his landscapes and his scenes were more somber and honest. Where before he was content with white backgrounds, his frames now hum with a bigger and a profound vision of life. Some of his works are still flawed but Malang, at 41, is young, and is still maturing. He can achieve for his art what he has done for his cartoons.

The present Malang is almost an artist in residence in Malacañang, hence plays a powerful role in shaping the tastes of the tenants at the Presidential Palace. He has endowed erstwhile drab state documents with a new excitement and creativity. There are other less known facets of the Malang versatility: that of a muralist and of a business entrepreneur. He is doing good at both. In the Malang lexicon, brush rhymes with cash.

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