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Celebrating God, country and family through art

Cebu painter, Celso Pepito, sees his art as a vehicle to showcase the best in Philippine culture and values.

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Having cemented his place in the art scene both here and abroad, visual artist Celso Pepito now embarks on a larger mission. He wants to tell the world about the positives in the Filipino: the peoples' talents, their

virtues, and the richness of their culture.

“I’ve gone around the country and have seen many great places. Everywhere, I try to observe the positive side of us, Filipinos,” the artist narrated. He has made it his mission to depict in his paintings the best that can be visually offered of Philippine culture.

The 65-year-old native of Cebu has dedicated his life to painting over the last four decades. He has developed a personal style of cubism and his paintings sell well both locally and abroad. In 2019, the City Government of Cebu honored him with its “Outstanding Individual Award”.

“25 years into my career,” Pepito recalled, “I realized that my art can serve a higher purpose. I can use it to motivate and inspire the public to get involved in planting the seeds of

positivity in our country, not just harping on the negative.”

“Style is one thing, but what is important is the message,” said the artist. “For example, if people ask: ‘Celso, why did you paint mangoes?’ I can say: ‘Because I want to help Cebu promote the mango...’ You know, Cebu has delicious, sweet mangoes,” he shared with a smile.

3 Planar Themes

Sonia Yrastorza, president of Cebu Artists Incorporated, commented on the artwork below. She said, “As is usual with a Pepito painting, this one shows the three planar divisions and embodies what the artist considers significant: God, country and family.”

“Love of God is depicted in the image of the Sto Niño. That image is in the limelight now, as we are celebrating the quincentennial of the coming of Christianity to our shores,” Yrastorza

said. “The guitars are symbols of the Filipino people's talent and love for music, which allows us to rise and keep it all together in times of crises. The joy in the children's faces brings to mind the importance of family, whether in times of celebration or whenever the need for a support system comes,” Yrastorza explained.

Art and Saint Josemaria

“I started painting artworks with Catholic elements early on in my practice,” Pepito shared. “It was, however, my exposure to the teachings of St. Josemaria Escriva that made me realize that my creative work had a place in God's plan for evangelization.”

The artist recalled, “There was a point in St. Josemaria's book, *The Way*, that made a deep impression on me. It said: ***‘Don't have a small town outlook, enlarge your heart until it becomes Catholic -***

Universal... Don't fly like a barnyard hen, when you can soar like an eagle.”

“St. Josemaria’s ideas of sanctification in work and ordinary life helped me define my relevance in the world as a painter, as a husband, father, and citizen of my country. Above all, they helped nurture my creativity and spirituality,” Pepito confided.

Art collector Armida Caguitla explained the features of the artwork above. “The ipil wood was sourced from Palawan. It depicts a family celebrating the *Sinulog*, a traditional dance ritual in honor of the miraculous image of the Sto. Niño. On the background is the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño de Cebu, where it is enshrined.”

The Sto. Niño is the oldest Catholic image in the country, brought by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521.

“Celso's use of bright colors combined with his signature cubist style is a modern illustration of a deeply religious way of life which started 500 years ago,” Caguitla explained.

Resilience and religiosity

“I like to portray the Filipinos' sense of resiliency, hardwork, cooperation, and religiosity. As much as possible, I show the 3 themes of love of God, love of family and love of country,” Pepito said of his paintings

It may seem that he is portraying negativity in the painting below, but actually the artist is trying to inspire people by depicting the resilience and toughness of the Filipino in the midst of difficulties brought about by natural calamities.

"This artwork says a lot about an ordinary Filipino family and the challenges surrounding it,”

commented Ahmed Cuizon, Regional Director of the Land Transportation Board in Cebu. “Despite difficulties brought about by adverse socio-economic conditions, the family remains steadfast in its deep faith in the Almighty, confident that it will overcome all odds with prayers and good deeds,” the Director explained.

He said further, “It celebrates Christianity as a gift that must be shared to the larger community since the family is the basic unit of society. It shows the Filipinos’ strong belief in attaining victory over hopelessness and desperation, through God’s love.”

Challenges in an artist’s life

Pepito reminisced, “I graduated with a Diploma of Fine Arts in 1981. I worked in two companies for three months, then decided to go full time into painting.”

“Getting married to Fe Madrid in 1984 made me anxious about whether I could provide for my family,” he confided. “But the coming of my children - Darryl, Karren and Von Ryan - pushed me to bring my artistic skills to a higher level and to seek professional recognition in my work as a painter,” Pepito said.

“The coming of my five grandchildren, in more recent times, pushed me to work even harder, but more importantly, it gave me the joy and fulfillment of becoming a grandfather,” he happily expressed.

Fulfilling a dream

“My objective now is to motivate others to do their share in nation-building. I want to move Filipinos to take care of their families and to be assets in society. I want to help them discover the rich cultural heritage that we have as Filipinos. Lastly, I want to inspire them to put God in

their daily undertakings, whatever their profession may be,” the artist shared.

Last April 2021, together with the many activities to launch the year-long celebration for the 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines, Celso and his wife opened ArtPortalCebu, their small gallery in the town of Consolacion. “My dream is to one day have a museum that will showcase the best of our positive culture,” Pepito shared.

He now dedicates time to training and developing young Filipino painters, guiding them along the lines of his triple values: God, country, and family. “And I include in my prayers that, with their art, they may be successful professionally and financially,” he confided.

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