

# THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL MUSEUM : AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

by Francis Flores Caberoy

**A** country's national museum helps promote consciousness and awareness of cultural values. Through research studies and scientific investigations, it aims to develop the nation's identity as a people.

In the Philippines, the real concept of a museum is defined as : "it being a place where objects of historical, cultural, scientific, and aesthetic values are collected, studied, preserved and exhibited for the public's education and enjoyment.

The idea of exhibiting valuable specimens for education was first introduced in the Philippines by the Spaniards in 1601. Medicinal specimens found endemic to the Philippines were first exhibited in the first sectarian school, the University of Sto. Tomas (UST). The exhibition was called "Materia Medica" and was primarily used as references by students, teachers, and researchers in the university.

The Americans, in the early 20th century, started the Philippines' concept of a museum. They mastered the country's physical attributes and its people, their customs and traditions, technology, arts and values. It was during their stay in the Philippines when, on October 29, 1901, the Insular Museum of Ethnology, Natural History and Commerce was created under the Department of Instruction.

The Insular Museum functioned as the country's repository and guardian of its cultural heritage and natural history. Its name and location, however, have been changed from time to time until, in 1939, it was renamed the Philippine National Museum and placed under the Department of Agriculture and Commerce.

The latest change happened in 1987 when the Philippine National Museum was placed under the Department of Education Culture and Sports. As embodied

in the newly ratified constitution of 1987, it is responsible for nation-building through its scientific, cultural and educational activities.

The Philippine National Museum conducts basic research studies combining laboratory and field work in the fields of geology and paleontology, botany, zoology, and anthropology. It maintains reference collections on these disciplines and promotes scientific development in the Philippines.

To disseminate scientific and technical knowledge into more understandable and practical forms, it exhibits and publishes materials for the public. It also gives lectures and show slide or visual presentations. Portable loan kits and interviews to students, researchers, and the general public are done in the attainment of its educational goals.

## MUSEUM ACTIVITIES

The Philippine National Museum has set up networks in the form of the following different divisions. Overseeing the whole operation including the planning is its Director (head of agency).

### 1. Scientific

**1.1 Geology Division** - conducts researches; collects, preserves and studies systematically rocks, minerals, fossil plants and animals; conducts researches on their origin, history and geographic distribution; prepares for publication of scientific papers on the above-mentioned subjects; maintains reference collections of rocks, minerals and fossils.

**1.2 Zoology Division** - conducts researches; collects, preserves and studies systematically animal vertebrates including mammals, birds, reptiles, fish and frogs, invertebrates such as shrimps, crabs, insects, mollusks and other miscellaneous lower animals such as worms, sponges, corals, etc; prepares for publications of scientific papers on the above mentioned subjects; maintains reference collections of the different types of Philippine fauna.

The author is a senior museum researcher at the Philippine National Museum's Education Division.

**1.3 Botany Division** - conducts researches; collects, preserves and studies systematically all types of plants such as flowering plants, gymnosperms, ferns and their allies, liverworts and mosses, algae, fungi and lichens; prepares for publication scientific papers on the above mentioned subjects; and maintains the Philippine National Herbarium.

**1.4 Anthropology Division** - conducts researches; collects, identifies, reconstructs, restores, preserves, and mounts specimens; studies archaeological artifacts, ecofacts and ethnographic objects; collates and interprets data; sets up exhibitions and publishes scientific and technical papers; maintains a chemical research and conservation laboratory where scientific analysis of materials recovered from archaeological and ethnographic sites are undertaken for their interpretation and preservation and where basic research is conducted in respect to the above; and maintains a polynology reference collection.

## 2. Cultural

**2.1 Arts Division** - creates, collects, preserves and restores objects of arts; conducts researches on Philippine arts and its relation to the arts of other countries; prepares for publication research papers on the above mentioned subjects.

**2.2 Cultural Properties Division** - implements related laws for the protection and preservation of Philippine cultural property; regulates the registration, excavation, exportation, and commerce of Philippine cultural properties; undertakes researches on important cultural properties and related laws on their protection and conservation; and undertakes salvage archaeology in illegally disturbed sites.

**2.3 Restoration Division** - implements relevant laws and governs immovable cultural properties; supervises the restoration, preservation, reconstruction, demolition, alteration and remodelling of immovable cultural properties, historical landmarks, archaeological or historical sites; and conducts researches on the original design, materials and methods of restoration best suited to specific problems of cultural properties.

## 3. Educational

**3.1 Museum Education Division** - plans, organizes and stages exhibitions on all the disciplines covered by the National Museum; prepares for public reading all scientific and technical manuscripts including their illustrations; takes charge of public information, public relations, printing and educational programs of the museum through guided tours,



Philippine National Museum staffs (left) are shown lecturing deaf-mute students on the conservation of baskets, artifacts, and others while a special teacher (right) interprets the lecture.



Disabled students are seen viewing the “Spolarium”, a huge painting by Juan Luna, during one of the free guided tours normally given by the Philippine National Museum’s Education Division staffs.

lectures, seminars, symposia or workshops, audio-visual programmes and travelling exhibits.

**3.2 Planetarium Division** - disseminates astronomical knowledge and information through lectures, demonstrations, exhibits and actual celestial observations.

**3.3 Archaeological Sites and Museums Division** - administers, maintains, preserves, and interprets through exhibitions in the regions where they are found, the cultural and historical materials, relics, mementos of great Filipinos and other related items; maintains, preserves and interprets the artifacts *in situ* in the Paleolithic habitation site of ancient man in the Cagayan Valley and of the neolithic habitation of modern man at the Tabon caves in Palawan.

#### **4. Other Services - By Museum Personnel**

**4.1** They conduct guided tours for museum visitors and guests.

**4.2** Museum experts oblige when invited as lecturers or resource persons in school, universities, colleges or other public forums.

**4.3** Museum specialists in exhibition and museum administrators extend technical assistance in setting up museums and exhibitions, and in training interested groups with basic curatorial work.

**4.4** They assist students, researchers and the general public in researches undertaken for different disciplines.

**4.5** They conduct annual art classes for children to develop their interests and talents in art whether at the main office of the National Museum or in the regional branches.

**4.6** They assist and support up-and-coming Filipino and foreign artists with the free use of the museum’s art gallery.

**4.7** They undertake free identification of specimens in geology, botany and zoology.

**4.8** They coordinate and collaborate with organizers of special exhibitions in art and other cultural activities whether or not held at the National Museum.

Aware of the need to bring museum services to the majority of the citizens particularly in the grassroots level, the National Museum established and maintains at least 13 archaeological sites or branch museums throughout the archipelago.

The Philippine National Museum has also taken the lead in the study and preservation of the Philippines’ rich artistic, historic and cultural heritage as well as in the reconstruction and rebuilding of the country’s glorious past, including its people. It is tasked with the establishment of the real Filipino identity.