



Jose Joya: Portrait of a Filipino Artist

Artists are indebted to their society. While they paint to express a personal feeling, they must see to it that they go beyond their personal goals. Their feelings must also reflect what their society feels and experiences.

That piece of advice comes from the Philippines' foremost abstract expressionist artist, Jose Joya. As one of the most outstanding artists of Southeast Asia, Joya has behind him a lengthy record of art exhibits, held both in the Philippines and abroad.

Jose Joya is a professor of Fine Arts in the University of the

Philippines. When the college was reconstituted as an autonomous College of Fine Arts, he became its first dean. During his tenure as dean,

Story by

Bertoldo J. Manta

he successfully launched workshops on art techniques, art education in the country side and the depressed areas of Metropolitan Manila, especially Tondo.

His initiative mission aimed at the development of a balanced society, a well-rounded citizenry. Endeavouring to improve the quality of life in the rural areas through arts, Joya organized scholarship

programmes for talented young artists from the rural areas. Through art competitions, he opened the way for these young artists and art teachers to develop their artistic talents in urban educational institutions.

Joya's artworks have mostly portrayed the Filipino rural folks, from the northern tip of Luzon down to the southern islands of Mindanao. Although these folks have rarely seen the metropolitan art scene, they have been enthusiastically appreciated through Joya's art forms and colours. Through Joya, their lives and sentiments are depicted artistically. Awareness of the Filipino rural folks have, at least, contributed to the unification of the Filipino masses.

Exploring different creative forms through multiple media, he puts his silent poetry on tapestries,

The author is SPAFA's Senior Specialist for Visual Arts.

ceramics, rice paper, and other contemporary art media. Joya's main artistic vision is indicated by his strong expressions in figurative drawing and abstractionism in collage.

His abstractionism in collage technique was inspired by his exposure in various international art forums. He intuitively combines ideas and materials, staging the images aesthetically, without losing his analytical and intellectual calibre.

In his collage, blocks of vibrant colours seem to explode and splatter, transcending from a central point. The artist explains that his early paintings are expressions of his emotional reactions to events and experiences. But his passions, giving way to the spontaneity of his technique, are embedded in his recent works. They present his impressions of nature.

He says, "My work is abstract in the sense that one does not see the outside appearance of nature, yet one still senses them. Forms become abstract in the sense that they are highly imaginative, inventive shapes."

One critic described Joya's work best when he said, "Joya's paintings possess the colour of unsublimated human ardour and project the orgiastic abandon of a festival. No matter how discordant they may seem to sound, their final effect is the full rounded tone."

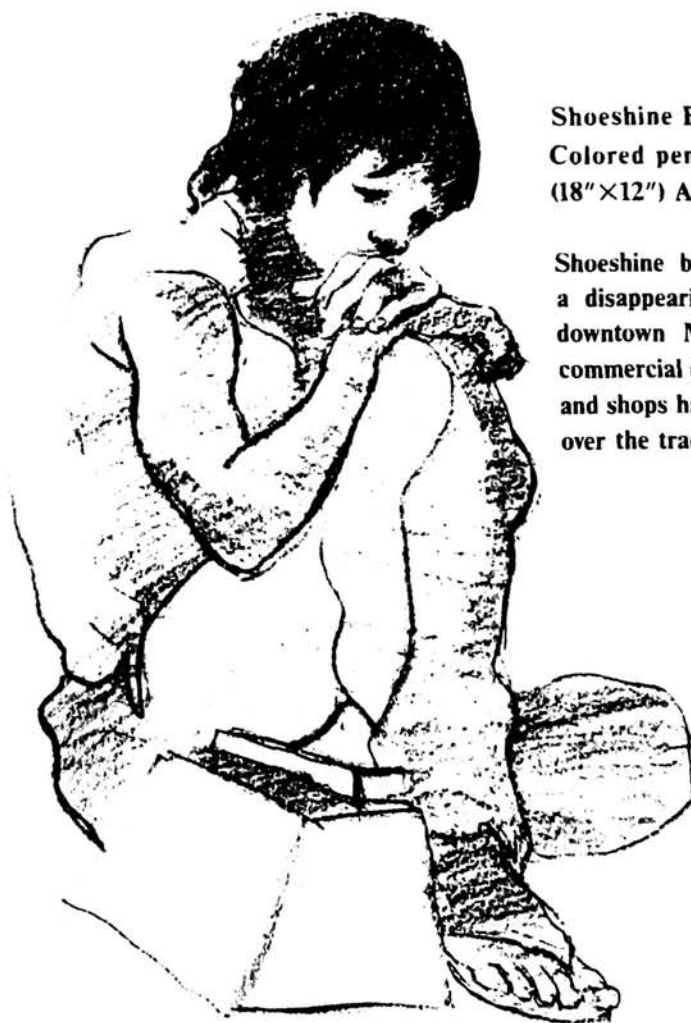
Through his remarkable choice of colours, Joya captures the joys of life, the lively celebrations of the Filipino folk fiestas, and the rural scenario. Indeed, these aesthetic portrayals reveal the rich Philippine cultural heritage and contribute to the development of national consciousness in the hearts of the Filipino viewers.

While his abstract paintings in oil and acrylic indicate his capacity as a colourist of the higher level, his sepia sketches have reached the pinnacle of his mastery in linear forms. Joya's figurative sketches always capture nature, often times the source of his inspirations.

Artist Joya usually sketch his subjects in brown and burnt amber; the earthy colour of Asia. Most of his sketches are done in sepia (brown with venetian red and black pencil) and marking ink. Among his favour-

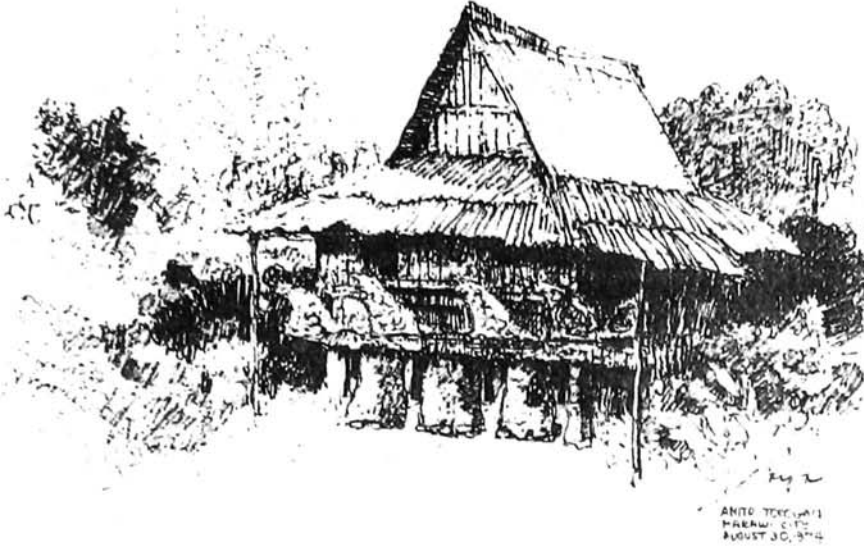
ite themes are the Filipino peasant farmers, landscapes, and remnants of the colonial period such as historical buildings and churches. The mother and child, portrayed in different ethnic versions, has also been a frequent subject.

Portraits of the humble and the downtrodden, he says, offer a broad range of stimulating forms. Their innocence, honest facial expressions mirror their true character. Although faces of the rich and powerful occasionally appear in his artwork,



Shoeshine Boy.
Colored pencil
(18"×12") April 28, 1976.

Shoeshine boys are a disappearing breed in downtown Manila where commercial establishments and shops have taken over the trade.



Amito Torogan. Brown ink (12"×18")
August 30, 1974.

One of the three remaining royal houses in the outskirts of Marawi, near the lake. It has floating foundations of spherical rocks. The thatched roof has been replaced by rusty iron sheets.

they rarely inspire him to great heights.

He believes he should be in command of his creative forces, rather than be dictated by his model. Painting the rich, he says, usually involves a compromise which, more often than not, threatens artistic integrity. For this reason, he has shunned the lucrative field of portraiture.

As a professor of art, Joya clearly favours the acquisition of appropriate training and control of skills. During his classes, he moves through a vigorous series of exercises. He provides his students with ample drawing and painting demonstrations, calling for figurative explorations. While teaching, he stresses methods and procedures as the basis for the freedom to create.

His students often remember Joya as a thinker's painter, blessed with a powerful and delightful personality. Most often he invites his students to challenge him on canvas or the sketchboard. This, of course,

adds power and meaning to the neophyte's art work.

25 years in the practice of any profession represents nearly half a lifetime, says Joya. Usually, this provides one with sufficient insight, not to mention justification, to look back over the years for an assessment, he adds. He records his achievements by publishing books compiling his art works.

In 1973, Joya produced "A Book of Drawings." Then in 1978, he authored, "Joya by Joya," a book compiling five years' creative works as a teacher of art and a practitioner. The drawings illustrated by the book comprise the artist's on-the-spot sketches of the scenes witnessed during his travels throughout the Philippines. Another volume of paintings, made by Joya, is now tentatively scheduled for publishing.

"As a practitioner, I can only look back over the years with a measure of pride and humility at the roads I have travelled, the challenges met, frustrations overcome and



Girl in Filipina Dress. Colored pencil
(18"×12") March 12, 1974.

The 1930's is recalled in the costume this model managed to ransack from her family clothes chest. Hers is a typical Filipino face marked with deep dimples when she smiles. The *panuelo* or shoulder scarf that she wears has long been discarded as a basic part of the Filipino woman's national costume.

problems resolved or otherwise,' says Joya. Copies of his books have been distributed to Southeast Asian cultural libraries.

In 1953 Joya graduated magna cum laude from the College of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines. Holding a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, the artist travelled extensively in Europe and the U.S.A. on a Spanish government grant and a Smith-Mundt Fulbright scholarship.

He earned his Master of Fine Arts in 1957 at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. Thereafter he joined the University of the Philippines where he served as dean of the College of Fine Arts for eight years.

In 1977, Joya undertook an international programme of exhibitions in the U.S.A., Europe, and Asia. For three successive years, he organized one-man shows in San Francisco and Washington D.C. (U.S.A.), London, Madrid, and Brussels.

His painting exhibitions also reached, among others, the Metropolis International Galerie D'Art of Switzerland, the Palazzo Brancaccio of Italy, the Chinese Working People's Palace of Beijing, and the National Art Gallery of Malaysia. Five cities in West Germany are now waiting to see and appreciate his art exhibits.

Awards given to this Filipino national artist are too numerous to mention. Suffice it to say that he was recently decorated by the French government with the Chevalier dans l' Orde des Artes et Lettres. As an international art figure, his name is also listed in the 1980 issue of the Who's Who in the World, the 1982

issue of Who's Who in Art (Hans, Britain), and the latest edition of the Academia Italia's History of International Art.

Philippine art still has a long way to go. It moves with the time and is wide open to a world of exciting change in form, drawing and content. Many artists have developed a penchant for western art while only a few have appreciated the visual arts of the Orient.

Jose Joya, the Philippines' leading abstract painter, has created

an indelible mark in the art history of his country. He has set a trend and his dedicated and artistic energies have led to the progress of his country in abstract art.

By expressing the Filipino in his collage of colours, Joya has contributed to the awareness of his country's identity. He says, "The real value of a man's work is not measured by the fame and fortune he has gained but by the value people put on his works during his lifetime and after it." ■



Woman with Walking Stick.
Colored pencil
(22"×15") September 24, 1974.

To protect themselves from over-exposure to the sun, women in the rural areas of the Philippines usually fold a square of cloth over their heads. Worn with a striped *tapis* (*sarong*), the costume makes an attractive subject for artists.