Ed Defensor: “Lin-ay sang Iloilo”, The Icon of Ilonggo Pride

By Ed Defensor

(Following are excerpts of the artist’s speech during the unveiling of Ilonggo Pride Statue, Lin-ay sang Iloilo, atop the New City Hall in celebration of 74th Charter Day August 25, 2011)

When the good mayor, Honorable Jed Patrick E. Mabilog told me that he wanted a symbol of Iloilo on the dome of the New City Hall, the very first thing that came to my mind was that “I had dreamed of this before.”

Yes, as early as 15 years ago I already dreamed of a commission that would enable me to mold the symbol of Iloilo in brass or in bronze – the image was already clear and complete in my mind.

I dreamed of it in the same scale as it is today, but on the ground. Never did I imagine that it would be standing on the top of a dome and make history as the first of its kind in the whole Philippines.

What you see is the graceful figure of a beautiful peasant lady standing valiantly and proudly on a harvested field of rice.

I envisioned a symbol associated with our rice industry because to my mind Iloilo could not be represented otherwise since we have always been known as the rice granary of the whole Visayas, and several times in our history, of the whole country.

And to me, since our great city is the making of our great province, Iloilo therefore is both city and province. Thus, a symbol for one may as well be a symbol for the other.

What you see is a Lin-ay wearing the traditional bandana usually worn by farm ladies to protect them from the heat of the sun. On her neck she wears an ethnic necklace, symbolic of her ancestry, as she comes from a rich mythic past, from the Maragtas, the “Barter of Panay,” and the long line of heroic datus that peopled the island of Panay.

Her right arm cradles a bunch of harvested rice, symbolic of our prosperity. Her left hand holds another symbol of prosperity, the scythe or “garab” which has long been the traditional harvesting tool in the region.
I remember when I was a child in the farms of Mina, Iloilo, whenever I saw a “garab,” I knew right away it is “good times” for it is harvest time.

She wears an embroidered blouse, symbolic of one of the popular traditional arts of the city and province. On top of it is a “sablay” of a “hablon,” the textile which contributed to Iloilo’s becoming the second city of the Philippines, next to Manila, at the onset of the 19th century.

The whole figure of the Lin-ay is highlighted by the “patadyong,” our native hand-woven wrap-around skirt, for which no other province is better known than Iloilo. As a bonafide historian I dare say that Iloilo has the best patadyong in the whole country.

The Lin-ay is standing on a pedestal with four sides carved with major assets of Iloilo – front shows rice-farming industry, at right is sugarcane, left is fishing industry and back depicts education since Iloilo is considered as the educational center of the Visayas and Mindanao.

Thus, I have outlined the meaning, symbolism and history of the “Lin-ay Sang Iloilo.”

I would like to thank the good mayor for his vision, love and passion for Ilonggo culture and art, for conceiving this project and making history for the city.

Consequently, I would like to thank our donor, a beautiful person who truly loves Iloilo, a philanthropist in the true sense of the word, who gives without any strings attached, who has no political ambition whatsoever, and most importantly, who does not want to be mayor and who wants to remain anonymous, unknown even to the beneficiaries of this project.

I would also like to thank the valiant workers and carpenters of the City Hall building for braving all odds, dangers and threat to life in bringing the Lin-ay up to her pedestal to stand there forever as the symbol of the greatness and pride of Iloilo. Their applause after the Lin-ay was perched will forever be embedded in my heart and memory.


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