There’s a distinctive smell of wood amidst the mixture of paint and thinner lingering in the air. I could hear the constant pounding of multiple mallets on chisels carving away pieces of wood to make form to an otherwise large piece of wood. Occasional sawdust fills the air when sudden gust of wind blows through this open air wood carving workshop. Paete Woodcarving has been a thriving industry since the Spanish era until now. A walk at the town’s market road, it is hard not to notice the rows of shops, selling variety of wood work and paper mache. This crafty town of Paete, north-east of Laguna have earned its declaration as the Woodcarving Capital of the Philippines back in 2005. Thanks to proud Paetenians whose generations of wood carvers passed their skills and dedication for elevating the art. Here we meet some of the master woodcarvers that have etched their legacy in the town’s history.
A young woodcarver working meticulously

**Paete Woodcarving**

The Paete Woodcarving tradition runs deep in history, dating back in the pre-Spanish era. Even the town’s name, *Paete*, goes away from the Spanish colonizer’s norms of naming places after saints. It was a result of a misunderstanding between a native and a Franciscan priest. When asked what the place was, the native replied, *Paete*, referring to his **chisel**. He thought the priest was asking about the tool he was using. By 1580, Paetenians honed their craft by carving retablos and images used to ornate the churches in town and neighboring towns in Laguna.
Paloy Cagayat

Even at this time, families have continued the tradition Paete woodcarving. One notable woodcarver is Justino “Paloy” Cagayat, Jr. Already 3rd of his generation, his family owns one of the bigger open air wood carving workshops in Paete. Some of his prominent works are: the image of San Pedro Calungsod, which was brought to Rome for the canonization of the Filipino’s 2nd saint; the paper mache image of Ninoy Aquino, a work commissioned by the former President Corazon Aquino for Ninoy’s 10th Death Anniversary; and Paloy also got commercial fame when he daringly carved the mythical figure “Machete” used in the movies that starred Cesar Montano in 1990 and Gardo Versoza in 1993.

I watch in awe as Paloy worked on one of the religious image he was commissioned to do. He prefers to use batikuling wood – a soft wood abundant in the Sierra Mountain ranges whose scent naturally repels termites, ants and even wood worms. Occasionally by request, he also works on pricier woods like kamagong or narra. We watch how he manages the shop and his people. He has sharp eyes as minuscule details doesn’t escape him. His workers are his extension, making sure the quality remains.

It would seem Paloy’s influence on woodcarving has brushed off to the next generation of his family. His son, Franco Cagayat, is making a name for himself in carving model cars and other vehicles. Assuring the Cagayat art will continue on.
For inquiries on Paloy Cagayat’s work contact (+6349) 557.0641

Paloy is known for his bespoke religious wood works

Hand painting sculpture pieces
Making images of saints

Ornamental pieces
Luis Ac-ac

From religious images, we go to the life-like fine art wood sculptures of Luisito “Luis” Ac-ac. Describing his work, it is like Amarsolo’s paintings came to life in 3D. Luis depicts Filipino life in amazing detail through is sculptures. Scenes from rural livelihood, children playing traditional games and even our indigenous tribes. Luis, even at the age of 11 has started making wood sculptures as he grew up in Paete, gifted with five chisels from master blacksmith Tandang Nano Madrigal. As a student of UP Fine Arts, he have also worked under acclaimed master and National Artist Napoleon Abueva as apprentice. When he graduated, he set up his own studio in Paete.

One of his significant works is the Giant Jubilee Cross that stood in Manila last World Youth Day in 1995. The project led by Pope John Paul II has intricate carvings of scenes from the Holy Scriptures. Another pride of his work is the 5-foot tall piece of Lapu-lapu vs Magellan sculpture commissioned by a private collector that fetched for Php 600,000. Luis has other works from eminent people and establishments like in Ayala Alabang, Forbes Park up to Tagum in Mindanao.

For inquiry on Luis Ac-ac’s work, visit www.luis-acac.com
There are paintings and there are sculpture. Then there’s Angelito “Angelo” Baldemor who fused both crafts with such finesse we can call it paintures. As the brother of National Artist for Visual Arts, Manuel Baldemor, Angelo found his own style through painting over sculptures to give life and color to his works. His subjects covers a variety of rural harvest—from rice, corns, vegetable, fruits and flowers.

Angelo’s works have been acquired by collectors like the Abads and has done commissioned works for Ayala properties like Serendra in Taguig. Angelo’s family come from humble beginnings and through his perseverance he finished Fine Arts in FEATI University. His dedication to his craft has brought him places like in India where he was the sole Filipino representative for the India and Southeast Asian and Tribal Folk Arts in 2003 and also the Inami International Wooden Sculpture Camp in Toyoma, Japan. He has done several one-man exhibits already and his works are constantly displayed at Gallerie Y at SM Megamall. Angelo’s work not only represents the vibrancy of rural life objects but a symbol of pure hard work and passion for his art.

For inquiries on Angelo Baldemor’s work contact (+6349) 557.1875
One of Luis Ac-ac’s work on display at his workshop

Some of Angelo Baldemor’s work on display at his workshop
Ferdz Decena is an award-winning travel photographer, writer and blogger. His works has found print in publications such as Singapore Airlines’s Silver Kris, Philippine Airlines’ Mabuhay, Cebu Pacific’s Smile and Seair InFlight. He has also lent his expertise to various organizations like the Oceana Philippines, Lopez Group Foundation, Save the Children and World Vision, contributing quality images for their marketing materials.

Ref: [https://www.ironwulf.net/2016/05/24/laguna-paete-woodcarving-capital-masters/](https://www.ironwulf.net/2016/05/24/laguna-paete-woodcarving-capital-masters/)

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