Paete artists in one corner

After Sweet Home Angono, Paete is perhaps the most fascinating art town in the country because of its local creative folk whose craft has gone from their grandfathers to Gen Yers. And who knew they’re also gifted in classical and modern techniques of painting? Say it’s inevitable, but for a town more commonly known for its woodworks, it’s fascinating to discover a multiplicity of talents in one corner of Luzon.

And to talk of corners (a pun in *The Corrs* lingo), the men and women of the Paete Artist Guild led by Angelo "Lito" Baldemor exhibit their recent works from Laguna all the way to Pasig City in a university’s lovely lobby. There's no uniting artistic theme except that they all hail from a Laguna locale, and I mean, that already says a lot. These artists usually come from creative families who had nurtured their youngsters to grow up surrounded by brushes and chisels.

[Image: A wall transformed for the Banhay Art Exhibit at UA&P for the National Arts Month.]

Odette and Christine Cagandahan although sharing a last name and similar physical features seem to possess distinct tastes in art. Odette creates paintings of children’s faces with all their lines and peculiarities, which easily remind me of photorealistic profile works, but at the same time literally emotional in a cheerful, refreshing way.

And who said this age's paintings should always be emotionally shocking and averse? We are some of the happiest citizens in the planet after all.

[Image: Odette Cagandahan. Various paintings.]

Christine’s abstract works stand out for their simplicity amid the numerous complicated imageries found in the room. Her works explore form, as if balling up Malevich’s *suprematism*. Its gradients are refined and shapes are textured, making me think of culinary plating techniques (yum!) but applied on canvas.
But how does she translate this aesthetic on 3D? In the most unexpected manner, methinks. Her religious sculptures of metal and wood are deeply expressionistic. Jesus on the cross is scaled into an anatomy similar to General Grievous', though not sinister, drawn-out in a protracted pose and in terrible suffering.

Felix "Kid" Baldemor does two Santo Niño figures dressed in peasant clothing, one of them varnished and another painted. It's most possibly symbolic that the child has the stance of the priestly Christ with the idiomatic gesture for the sign of the cross and the torn garment suggesting a pierced heart.
Okay, so I just shot that halo into the photo, so don't think it's organically part of the work. Could've been providential.


Doctor and artist Nilo Valdecantos, owner of Kape Kesada Art Gallery & Cafe, channels interior spirituality to render the bloody face of Christ in expressionist fashion in *Black and White and Life*.

Nilo Valdecantos. *Black and White and Life*. oil on canvas

Benjamin Dailo and Lamberto Baldemor carve out characters as if borne from wood and moving through seemingly natural transition.
Benjamin Dailo. *Mag-ina.*

A Moses by Lamberto Baldemor.
Looking at such works and passing by this exhibit daily for the entire month made me more certain that today’s art need not be irreverent and lurid to be recognized. Why do more contemporary artists try so hard to be strikingly original to the point of desensitization from what’s aesthetically pleasing? Is artistic peace so hard to go back to?

Paete needs a push. A town with rare lineages of artistic blood and an economy run by creativity would be an enormous lost if the young ones don’t carry it on and forward. Sure, art is transcendent and lasting, but it’s also preserved by material and emotional value that needs nourishment.


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