These dolls are fitted with handsewn costumes with miniature embroidery. They represent …

By Anna Valmero

PARANAQUE, METRO MANILA—Dollmakers here like Virgilio Cortez Jr. have found a new way to preserve their colorful traditions such as sunduan and komedya by creating dolls wearing intricate costumes for each occasion.

“Most kids in our place today do not know that such traditions exist in Parañaque. By creating these dolls, we are educating the people about these celebrations and not to forget these as they are integral to every people living in Parañaque,” Cortez said.

Virgilio is a full-time artist and dollmaker with the Parañaque Livelihood Resource Management Office that offers livelihood programs for local entrepreneurs.

Parañaque's annual town fiesta every May 14 highlighted by the unique street pageant sunduan, which literally means “to fetch.” The feast was originally held during September but was moved to the summertime to avoid rains during the pageant.

The tradition aims to highlight that gentlemen from Parañaque's are romantics and they wait for the ladies they are courting to accompany her to the town plaza on a date and bring her home, all this while holding an umbrella so that the lady will be shaded from the sun.

Usually, the guy walks after the lady and holds the umbrella on his right hand. The girl usually holds an abaniko (wooden fan). In the old days, a man is not allowed to hold a woman's hand unless they are engaged to be married.
According to a paper by Dean Calleja, head of Special Services Office at the city government, sunduan depicts Christ's and Mary's ascension to heaven wherein the young ladies represent the two divinities while the gentlemen are the heavenly spirits.

Meanwhile, the komedya is a traditional play that depicts good relations between Muslims and Christians. This is staged live and usually involves a number of characters wearing ornately designed costumes.

Komedya is celebrated during the annual fiesta of Barangay San Dionisio. Dolls, wearing costumes designed to match the characters in the play (usually Filipinos, Spanish and Muslims), are put on display.

“Even the hair, we use real hair strands and tie them into a knot for the females while the guys have shorter hair. Each of the hair strands are painstakingly inserted one by one. That is how attentive to detail we are,” said Cortez.

The molds for the dolls are usually done after a week, including the sculpting and painting of the face and skin tone.

For the ornate dresses, it takes about three days to a week to handsew local fibers piña and jusi for the sunduan dolls, including the miniature embroidery designs that go into the Maria Clara and barong tagalog costumes. Even the miniature umbrella is made of local quality fiber.

The dolls are actually sold from P1,500 to P2,500 depending on its type. The intricate process in making these dolls the type of doll make these a bit expensive that regular dolls, said Cortez.

“More than a livelihood project, we are immortalizing our century-old traditions by making these dolls and we hope that Filipino doll collectors will pay attention to our products because these are crafted based on our culture,” he added.

You can find these dolls in trade fairs. Cortez is hoping they can also find a way to market and sell these to Filipinos overseas, especially those who are originally from Parañaque.


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