SOMETIMES, his house along Canillas Street in Leon town of Iloilo overflows with students from the University of the Philippines in the Visayas, or with members of the historical council from Antique.

It is an old two-storey wooden house that he himself had remodelled, with the assistance of a neighborhood handyman. The entrance was reinforced with concrete inlaid with shards of ceramics from the artist’s workshop, and the flooring is a mosaic of colourful tiles salvaged from a bargain hardware store in Iloilo City. His humble house is a showroom of paintings, sculptures, ceramics, and an assortment of his collections. It has practically become this small town’s tourist attraction.

Alan Cabalfin is an artist of mixed persuasions. Although originally breaking into the Iloilo art scene as a watercolorist, he became well-known as a ceramic artist, having apprenticed under Nelfa Querubin who used to have a pottery workshop in Miag-ao, Iloilo, and after training in ceramic art at Tokoname, Aichi, Japan in 1995. His sculptural works were then exhibited in galleries in Iloilo, Manila, and Dumaguete. He joined many group exhibits and festivals exhibiting his works.

Cabalfin’s passion for pottery was translated into cinema when he made his first short film after attending a Mowelfund Film Institute film-making workshop in 2000. His short film “Dihon” (Mold), which was set in the Querubin workshop in Miag-ao, earned a string of recognitions from the Cultural Center of the Philippines, Gawad Urian (Urian Awards), and the Film Academy of the Philippines awards in the short films and student categories. Recognition for this little film was topped by a First Prize in the Kodak Cinematographers Competition, making “Dihon” the country’s official entry to the Kodak Worldwide Student Program Cinematographers Competition in Sydney, Australia.
His love affair with film led him to work with several film projects: as production designer in Nick Deocampo’s “Mother Ignacia,” and as art director in Jonar Pueblo’s Ilonggo film “Dagyang.” He also directed the “Samayaay” video for the Iloilo National High School Special Program for the Arts.

But Cabalfin’s multiple talents was not left unnoticed by those he was able to work with. Soon, he found himself designing galleries for exhibitions and museums and doing sets for stage productions. He was asked to design the RVM Historical Museum and later the Heritage Hall in Quezon City, the Lourdes College Museum in Cagayan de Oro, the Evelio B. Javier Gallery and the Museo Antiqueño in San Jose, Antique, and the Guimaras Provincial Museum and Monument in Jordan, Guimaras. His practical yet highly creative and versatile stage designs using textiles were well appreciated by directors who asked him to design sets for ballet, sarswela, and even beauty pageants!

As art director for Miss Dinagyang and Lin-ay kang Antique for several years, Cabalfin's touch was seen in drapes and painted sceneries that complement the various segments of the pageant, much like imitating the patadyong (locally women textile from Panay). Cabalfin is well aware of the distinct weaving traditions in both Antique and Iloilo, that his production designs may well be a homage to these well-kept traditions.

As an artist, Cabalfin sees all these works not as mere money-making ventures. He believes that something must go back to the community where art belongs. While working as art director for the Museo Antiqueño in April 2007, where he did some terracotta dioramas, he was able to interact with the potters of Sibalom, where he sourced his clay. Seeing the traditional pottery-making in Bari, he volunteered to conduct workshops and lectures which helped the potters produce other designs aside from the functional banga (water jar), kuron (round bottomed-pot), and sig-ang (stove). Now, the potters dish out animal figurines, candle and lamp holders, which are easily picked up by garden enthusiasts at local trade shows. Six months later, he came back to the Museo Antiqueño for his the exhibition “Bag-o nga Daan,” his first pottery exhibit since his last in 1996.

When Cabalfin was invited to exhibit at the Philippine Center in New York last year, he decided to bring to the Big Apple something of Panay. His solo exhibition that ran from July 12-23, 2010 at the lobby of the Philippine Center was titled “Binanog: Panay Bukidnon on the Rise.” Binanog is the dance of the Panay Bukidnon, imitating the movements of the banog bird. The exhibition featured his paintings and ceramics that capture the delicate motifs of the Panay Bukidnon embroidery called panubok and the energetic movements of the binanog dance. One particular painting is a triptych called “Binanog sa Siyudad,” (Binanog in the City) showing three binanog dancers, each against the backdrop of urban skyline, identifiably Iloilo City, Hongkong, and New York.

Coming home from that New York exhibition, Cabalfin, hastily prepared another painting exhibit called “Binanog sa Siyudad” for the Karay-a Arts Festival held at Gaisano Grand Mall of Antique on October 22-23. He was so filled with inspiration. “I think that in my next projects, I will consciously try to show not only my art, but my culture as well,” he said.

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