
The Sariaya Tourism Council and the Quezon Provincial Tourism Council exhibited twenty paintings of Ateneo de Manila alumnus and visually-impaired painter L. De Guzman at Galleria Immanuel, Legazpi Village, Makati City, from September 6–16, 2013.

Entitled Gani-re Kami Di-ne (roughly, “The Way We Are over Here”), the exhibition was a chance for the viewer to be transported to bucolic scenes from Quezon, the painter’s province of origin. This, indeed, was a first, considering that De Guzman’s subjects for two previous exhibitions (A Tale of Muses and Dreams and Finding Paradise Lost) were renditions of flora, fauna, and human and mythological figures.

A comment by Maria Pureza Escaño, an internationally known artist who also hails from Quezon, was quoted in De Guzman’s blog (http://ldeguzman.wordpress.com): “Done in a style which is genuinely his own, imbued with painstaking, delicate brushstrokes and impeccable colors, Leodigario Rivera De Guzman’s works are ardent expressions of his memories of places which he celebrates in his heart.”

The twenty paintings were all done in acrylic, the medium that enables the artist to work with canvas, which he considers the most durable surface for painting. Oil, which also requires a canvas surface, is detrimental to the artist’s eyes—a permanent aftereffect of his severe bout with Stevens-Johnson Syndrome (SJS).

De Guzman is able to surmount the odds and create images in a combination of romantic, realist, and impressionist styles. His pieces that immediately catch the eye are those that render elegant sights from the centers of towns and cities, such as Old House in Sariaya, Quezon, and offer glimpses of the townsfolk’s most popular activities, such as Pahiyas Festival of Lucban, Quezon.

In this writer’s opinion, however, the artist’s most compelling pieces are those that hold easily missed views in the natural world. Sariaya Countryside # 3 is a rendering of coconut trees, various plants, a hut, and the sky; but all of these details are captured in such memorable arrangement. Another beautiful piece is Coconut Grove in Lucban, Quezon # 1, which, in the palpability of its details, invites the viewer to enter the scene and touch the various living things there.
De Guzman veers away from many of the innovations of modern art and explorations of contemporary theory. In an essay “A Brief Discussion on Art: Its Facets, Existence and Relevance,” published on his blog, he declares, “If there is one reason why artists should continue creating art, it is the upliftment of the human condition.” It can be gleaned from the rest of the essay that this upliftment is aligned with three ideals: the transcendence of suffering, the discovery of meaning in existence, and the maintenance of what the artist calls “the very fabric of society.” This writer believes that De Guzman’s brush with blindness and death bolsters his preference for these ideals, which he honors through presentation of visions of the rustic and the ordinary.

At the moment, the artist is at work on pieces for an exhibit entitled Sa Lilim ng Isang Puno: Isang Alay sa Atenista, which he calls “a means of reminiscence for a whole generation of Atenistas [students from Ateneo de Manila].” The exhibit will be held in July 2014 at the MVP Student Leadership Center in the Loyola Heights campus of the Ateneo de Manila University. Contemplating this and his previous tributes to myth and memory, one can indeed speculate that De Guzman, armed with his vivid art of roots and origins, could very well be a Teiresias of this generation.

Niccolo Rocamora Vitug
Department of English
Ateneo de Manila University
niccolo.vitug@gmail.com