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WRITING PHILIPPINE HISTORY OF IDEAS AND FERNANDO AMORSOLO'S MODERN ART

Jovino G. Miroy
Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines
jmiroy@ateneo.edu

Abstract

Writing Philippine history of ideas requires that we problematize the discipline of intellectual history itself. Rethinking of itself vis-a-vis cultural and social history, Philippine history of ideas would no longer rehearse the development of philosophy in the Philippines, but also of art, religion, etc. The paper discusses how Amorsolo may be considered a modern painter. Amorsolo's art eludes comprehension because his notion of subjectivity as well as intersubjectivity transgresses the Cartesian break between subject and object. As a modern painter, he positioned himself as an individualist, but was still able to communicate to his culture.

Keywords

alumbrism, Philippine modern art, relational narrative technique

About the author

Jovino G. Miroy is a faculty member of the School of Humanities of the Ateneo de Manila University. He specialized in Medieval History of Ideas from the Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven (Belgium). He is currently editor of the journal *Asian Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities*.

HISTORY OF IDEAS IN 21ST CENTURY AND GLOBALIZATION

Recently, historians of ideas have been doing significant self-evaluation, especially interrogating how the discipline should be approached in the age of globalization. In 2005 *The Journal of the History of Ideas* has dedicated an issue on the topic "History of Ideas in the Age of Globalization." In his article, Allan Megill discusses how the history of ideas was forced to engage with cultural history.¹ He uses Marx's dictum "as in material, so also in intellectual production" as starting point: "The question that arises from this conceptualization of reality is: Why should one write the history of legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophical ideas at all?" This is indeed the question the historian of ideas needs to answer in the age of globalization—"the spread of material technologies, the rise of rule-based procedures for doing things, and the impact of a market

economy that is ever more extended in its scope and interconnectedness" taken as "indications of a modernity that is much alive" ("Globalization" 180). In other words, globalization is the spread of modernity, otherwise known as "modernity's extensive tendency." It is within this backdrop that the history of ideas is questioned: "What else does the history of ideas [*die Geschichte der Ideen*] prove than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed?" (Marx and Engels qtd. in Megill, "Globalization" 183). By the history of ideas we adhere to Megill's description of the discipline: "I take the history of ideas to be a genre of academic investigation that focuses on past ideas themselves" (I have elsewhere referred to these as *articulate ideas*). The history of ideas attempts to situate ideas into one or another historical context and to interpret those ideas in the light of that contextualization, without reducing the ideas in question to mere epiphenomenon of something more fundamental ("Globalization" 183). Conceivably, another definition of the discipline may be given, but we use this as our working definition.

Megill himself does not think it is Marx's analysis that is in question here, but instead whether the reduction of intellectual history to material history is due mainly to Marx. Nevertheless, the materialist turn transformed historical discipline, diversifying the historical discipline itself. Furthermore, Megill concedes the pre-eminence of cultural history in the field of history. Citing Richard Biernacki, he explains how the new cultural history revises social history: "although the new cultural history has defined itself in opposition to an older paradigm of social history, it has tended to take material need as the foundation of History generally, in close agreement with the generalized historical materialism underlying social history" ("Globalization" 184). Biernacki explains that the turn cultural history makes is in considering culture and language as the "real and irreducible ground of history," rather than social and economic.

It is within this backdrop that we embark on the task of writing the history of ideas in the Philippines. In other words, how do we negotiate between these two waves in the writing of history? To be sure, there is no imperative to take sides on this debate. One suggests that this is the main reason why intellectual history is still required, not because a neutral position is possible, but that a third one is possible. In other words, our project, while working within the paradigm of intellectual history, is an intellectual history evolving through its dialectic with material history. The idea of the latter itself is evolving as societies develop and even as the notion of culture develops. As ideas develop, intellectual history is needed, because "ideas" develop.

How does Megill envision the role of intellectual history in the age of globalization? A scholar of Marx, he nevertheless adheres to a non-reducibility of history to material history. The intellectual historian tries to capture what is not repressed in that process. Conceived as two-fold phenomenon, globalization is both the spread of modernity and the resistances to it; it is that which opposes the sameness in processes. Within these differences, the history of ideas (in the Philippines)

could be done, and the history of ideas remains necessary in so far as currents in politics and economics still require evaluation: "For how can we understand (from a purely material point of view) the 'irrational' actions of voters, terrorists, and everyone else unless we understand, on the level of ideas and not by reduction to something else, the ideas that drive them?" A battle cry among current historian of ideas is "ideas have consequences." Since ideas are translated into political and economic choices, they need to be studied in a critical-historical manner (Megill, "Globalization" 187).

This paper, however, does not wish to argue for the continued relevance of the history of ideas for us. We underscore that if the history of ideas in the Philippines were to be done, it would require an engagement with the idea of history that had already made two important turns: namely, the social-economic turn, and the cultural-linguistic turn. This would obviate the requirement to justify the engagement of art for the history of ideas, notwithstanding the numerous articles on art and the history of ideas.² Even more crucial is that while we write our history of ideas, we realize that this will not be a rendition of our intellectual history merely as "philosophy," but will inescapably take culture in account.³ Thus, intellectual history as this study understands it has two important qualities: it understands the diversification that has happened within the historical discipline itself, and at the same time, it understands the inter-disciplinarity required in doing history.

Within this framework, we engage the art of Fernando Amorsolo in the writing of Philippine history of ideas, a process which aims to dialogue with cultural history as well as art history. In 2008, the Philippines honored one of its most beloved artists, Fernando Amorsolo with an impressive seven-museum exhibit, "His Art, Our Heart" (Pilar).⁴ Filipinos owe a debt to the curators whose marvelous essays that accompanied the exhibits have ascertained the continued significance of Amorsolo to the twenty-first century global Filipino. Their careful study of Amorsolo illuminated a brand of modernity that questioned our conceptions of modern art as well as of modernism conceived in the western sense.

REALISM AND NEW REALISM

The modern art we recognize is either abstract or surreal. This creates intellectual tension as Gustave Courbet is its accepted starting point; modern art, then, cannot be separated from a certain kind of "realism."⁵ Courbet's brand of realism bears the mark of modern art defined as the defiance towards established forms (or Academism) that was being celebrated in the Salons. Rebelliousness towards establishment art is one of the marks of Courbet's realism, which primarily subverted idealism. Courbet himself, despite his depiction of "real people" (mostly his friends

among the modern French *culturati*), also had a symbolizing tendency. This penchant is less prominent than his desire to be “authentic to what is visible.” As Alice Guillermo explains, “In 1850 Courbet strongly expressed his political stand when he declared: ‘I am not only a socialist, but also a democrat and a republican, in a word, a partisan of revolution and above all, a realist, that is, the sincere friend of the real truth’” (43). Another major aspect of realism is the utilization of the photographic style on canvass. When photography was invented, artists finally found an effective medium of “capturing” reality. Modernists could now use photography to “guide” them in their renditions of “what was real.”

This sense of realism as a break from the idealistic forms is what may be called the modern art redefining man no longer as *imago Dei* (Harries 148). Considered a primary aspect of modernism, this was part and parcel of the rupture from a primary religious outlook that gripped the human being till then as he asserted his own identity and freedom. Eventually, however, New Realism would question this view, insofar as the realism arising from the tradition of Courbet had only depicted external reality. As delineated by the art of Kandinsky, authentic freedom is in man’s inner reality (i.e., subjectivity). Nevertheless, abstract art alone could make this interior world visible. The mature expression of the defiance which Courbet began rests here. Abstractionism, (e.g., Rothko’s), would be understood not only as a picture of the Nietzschean revolt but also of divinity expressed in human freedom.

In Asia, Philippine Art has followed these major global cultural developments. It could also be claimed that the revolt of modernity occurred even during the colonial period when the Academy of Art was established. John Clark explains three modes of transfer of modernity that happened in Asia, namely, in colonial, neo-colonial, and non-colonial conditions. In a colonial condition, the Academy of Art is the standard *locus* of transfer, and here he uses the example of the Philippines. According to him, two important events commenced a pronounced interest in painting in the Philippines in 1785. Firstly, the edict of Charles III of Spain removed the exclusive right to paint from the Augustinian order, thus enabling artists to practice art without church license. Secondly, the establishment of Art Academies: “Painting rapidly developed among *mestizos*, especially Damian Domingo, who founded the first of several private art academies in Manila for the transmission of Spanish painting conventions.” But it wouldn’t be till the middle of the succeeding century, 1846/1855, that the *Academia de Dibujo y Pintura* was established, becoming the first Asian art school (apart from the art schools in India). Clark, however, nuances this transfer as *possibly* a transfer of technical skill rather than of modern philosophy (52). This means that a more extensive study of the relation of the Academy practice and the transfer of modernism is required. We note, for instance, that after founding of the *Academia de Dibujo* commenced the Propaganda Movement and the founding of *Katipunan*. At this point, painting became the preoccupation of

individuals as artists emerged from the anonymity of the crafts tradition used in religious painting. Clark, however, does not extend his discussion to the American period, when the *Escuela de Bellas Artes* was established at the district of Quiapo, where the young Fernando Amorsolo matriculated in 1909. Thus, we have historical evidence that the transfer of modernity was done in the colonial period through Academy painting. Fernando Amorsolo (considered an Academicist) came late in this development, and thus was a mere participant in a mode of transfer of modernity previously established.

EARLY PHILIPPINE MODERN ART

Since the time of the Propagandists, Filipino intellectuals have greatly preoccupied themselves with the question of modernity. But this reflection comes to a sharper focus during the time of the American occupation and World War II. It also happens simultaneously with identifying the meaning of Filipinism in the 1930s.⁶

In the construction of Philippine art historiography, Fernando Amorsolo is considered to appear after the Romanism of Juan Luna and Hidalgo, who both made marks in the international scene, putting the Philippines in the map of world art in less than a century after the establishment of the first Academy of Art in Manila.⁷ Amorsolo was the comet that emanated after them but who would not have an international career. Furthermore, art history would also situate him before Victorio Edades and Fernando Zobel. The former would be closer to disfigurement and expressionism, the latter to abstract expressionism. Tradition of art appreciation among aficionados, however, deem Amorsolo a realist, and thus a “romantic,” and Edades as the first figure to defy Amorsolo’s brand of “pretty pictures,” and brand of art as decoration (Canete 82-87).

Our paper, however, contends that Amorsolo, although a realist and perhaps a romantic, was also part of the modernist movement. In order to understand the extent of his modernity, we need to establish whether Amorsolo displayed continuity or discontinuity in relation to the painters at the end-point of the Spanish Academy period. What happens when we read the painters before Amorsolo from a more sharply defined notion of modernism?⁸ Astonishingly, Felipe Roxas’s *Antipolo Church* (1889) and Amorsolo’s *Maytime in Antipolo* (1943) demonstrate that they are almost the same painting for we see similar perspective and comparing of the textures of the nipa huts and the stone temples in Roxas’s painting. Amorsolo, however, imbues the scene with drama insofar as the emotions of the merrymakers in the foreground contrast with the isolation of the church. He also chooses to paint the top of the belfry with red, in contradistinction with the pale green of the Roxas’s. The church of Amorsolo shines more brilliantly and eloquently compared to the earlier one. The sense of fullness and harvest is clearer in Amorsolo with its verdant tree that

takes the attention away from the place of worship, diverging from the ground's barrenness in the earlier painting. About the lean-to in the middle of the painting, the earlier painting has a sense of individuality absent in Amorsolo's painting. But even the sense of realism is more acute in the Roxas painting; Amorsolo's has a dream-like quality.

Despite a possible influence, Amorsolo exhibits more differences from than similarities with the earliest paintings. Rather than landscapes, for example, we find ourselves within interior scenes and gardens in earlier paintings (Gatbonton et al. 57). *Tampuhan* is set inside the upper storey of a house in "the city." More especially there is *Interior del studio de luna* and *Panguigeras*—a favorite scene in *alte* Spanish Colonial art.⁹

Nevertheless, *Nipa Huts* of Lorenzo Guerrero should be compared to *Mandaluyong* (Fig. 116 in *Fernando Amorsolo*). One could only wonder why the earlier painters did not depict the Philippine sunlight at the end of the nineteenth century. Clearly, the light motif of Amorsolo did not come from the painters during the Spanish era. Noticeably, it was Amorsolo who introduced luminosity and airiness. Earlier artists were also fond of capturing the still pristine and unsullied river Pasig. Even more significantly, a radical break from colonial art is in the depiction of women. A case in point is the Maria Magdalena figure in Colonial art (Gatbonton et al. 17), or Juan Arzeo's painting, which had a Magdalene's hair flowing to the floor (Gatbonton et al. 31). Slowly when painters started to represent real women, their long hair was shown in a bun instead of unbraided. In an Amorsolo portrait, especially of the American ladies, the status of hair is even more interesting: women seem almost tomboyish with their cropped coiffures. This is a clear break from what went before, a signal of change and modernization. At the same time, in the late nineteenth century, artists started to depict architecture, especially native structures, following the idea of depicting nature realistically and not just academically, as in Fray Blanco's drawings of *flora*.

Realism, therefore, started very early in Philippine visual arts, which was arguably at pace with developments in Europe at that time. In 1880, Felix Martinez painted scenes of local color and of combinations of interior and natural spaces. Thus, the window would be an opportunity to draw nature. But consider *Despues de la Merca* (1885), which leads one to inquire about the identity and subjectivity of the woman in the painting. Is she a maid, a mother, or both, who, almost Vermeer-like, is clearly an appendage to the architecture? The woman is associated with fruits inside an urban domicile, presaging Amorsolo's women with baskets of fruit.¹⁰ By 1896, we have depictions of the river, which became a kind of focal point of culture, even, say, in Rizal's novels. A symbol of change and progress, the river welcomed different kinds of barges containing all kinds of traded products. Before the turn of the century, there was a greater interest in women, nature, the river, planting, farmers; but there were no explicit reference to men or the revolutions happening globally.¹¹

Furthermore, we notice a weak strain of social realism in these late colonial art, for instance, *Untitled*, a painting of two women with an oriental umbrella who are probably going to church (Gatbonton et al. 85). In the early 1900s, Sunday finery is favorite subject for painters, in order to perform a subtle form of fashion reporting. Interesting is de la Rosa's *Women Weaving Hats* (1930); set in interior space, we see women bent and faces are unseen. In contrast to *Despues de la Merca*, here the women, with men's hats, are working in a very small scale business. The window does not lend a view of the idyllic, but an angular cityscape, with a pot of an emaciated plant. This is not about verdant nature, but about the camaraderie of industrious women. Even in his rice planting scenes, this kind of interest is absent from Amorsolo (the prize winning *Buyo Chewers* by Jorge Pineda [1904]). An early nature painting is *Road to Marikina* (1839), which depicts Marikina in an unexploited state. There is a male figure, probably the proprietor, who is not doing anything, probably waiting for a ride and looking up to the birds.

Relating him to late Spanish colonial works convey that Amorsolo is really part of his time, dealing with the same subject matter as Fabian de la Rosa, et al. Initial analysis, however, also yields that he broke away from them, which might mean that he drew his influences somewhere else. Amorsolo is a realist and representationalist of a different order. Even his view of Philippine culture differs sharply: there would be no images of sweaty women bent by hard work in his paintings, for example. At the time immediately before Amorsolo's maturation as an artist, we sense an ardent distancing from "the traditional view," which is an indication of his modernity. Unlike his immediate predecessors, Amorsolo allows the viewer to participate in the meaningfulness of the painting. Unlike Courbet, who announced the radical turn he was going to make, we see in Amorsolo silent subversions. In the way he manipulates meaning in history and genre paintings, his art has made a turn from tradition. Even more astonishingly, his subversions made his art very accessible to the ordinary viewer. He uses the familiar to draw the viewer in, and puts enough detail to bring the painting to a different plane of relational meaningfulness, where in the viewer has a role to play.

INFLUENCE OF SOROLLA'S ALUMBRISMO

We must now ask from where Amorsolo drew the influence for his new kind of art.¹² According to undocumented information, when Amorsolo went abroad in 1919, he was exposed to one of the most important influences on his art, Joaquin Sorolla. The sense of the modern in Amorsolo could certainly be understood if we correlate it to the art of Sorolla, who himself was greatly influenced by Courbet (Peel; Gracia; Garin; Sorolla; *Sorolla-Zorn*). Underscoring this aesthetic lineage could make us appreciate better the radicalness of the realism of Amorsolo. As far

as the literature is concerned, historians of art still have to establish the relationship between Sorolla and Amorsolo. Such a comparison is often absent in any presentation of Amorsolo's art.¹³

According to sources, Sorolla moves from Romanism to *Alumbrism*, which is the "ismo" closest to the art of Amorsolo.¹⁴ This "ismo" has no ideological content,¹⁵ and Sorolla's Valencian nationalism might explain the source of Amorsolo's nationalism. For this reason, Sorolla presents us with an interesting detail in understanding the *ism* of Amorsolo: is the *ism* of Amorsolo one that has no *ism*? Is it without content, in the same way that the art of Sorolla is all about seeing and what is seen rather than thinking about what is seen (and the act of seeing)? Likewise, is Amorsolo's an art that also led to nationalistic identification? Is this the draw of the art of Amorsolo about seeing rather than thinking?

Sorolla's development can be likened to the history of Philippine art. His early works remind us of Juan Luan and Hidalgo than Amorsolo: for example, *Mesalina en brazos del gladiator* (1886). This can be considered part of the Roman tradition in Spanish painting; that is, of artists depicting scenes from ancient Roman history. Known for his *alumbrismo*, Sorolla might have allowed Amorsolo to be fascinated with the Philippine light. The Spaniard, however, depicted the sea more than the fields and mountains. Aside from the light motif, the depiction of Sevillanas or ordinary folks can also be a parallel, although Sorolla's has a less finished look, which is a reaction to Academism. Another parallelism is the photographic point of view; another is the so-called slice of life.¹⁶ Nothing in Sorolla evokes grandeur, which one may argue to be present in Amorsolo, especially in the Mayon Volcano paintings.¹⁷

They are most distant in their portraits. Compare for example *Clotilde con traje de noche* (Fig. 89 in Garin 285) with the *Portrait of Felicing Tirona* (Fig. 7 in *Fernando Amorsolo*). Reacting against Academism, Sorolla is definitely less polished in his portraits generally than Amorsolo, which is sometimes accused of being *too* Academic. Sorolla seemed to revel in seeing women from a distance, and always from a superior point of view. While his women are full-bodied without being Grecian, Amorsolo's women shift between goddesses and butterflies.

Let us look at Figs. 80-82 (*Fernando Amorsolo*) called *Winnowers*. This is one of Amorsolo's scenes: at the center stands a winnowing figure, a lass, perhaps on her first week on the job, eager to do the work, unlike the bent figures around her (maybe she is an urbanite doing "immersion" in the rural areas). She is the dominant vertical female figure; veiled, her face is in between an Anita Magsaysay-Ho abstraction and a Virginal figurine. There is nothing personal in her look; she is after all just a winnower. The painter seems to be more interested in her clothes, her brightly colored *tapis* flowing in the wind, the symbol of joyful but naïve acceptance of the hardships of life. In the painting, figures of breasts abound: the mound of *palay* bellowing from the verdant field, the *salakots*, and the hay stack. In contrast are the horizontal wood, sometimes more delineated,

sometimes impressionistic (depending probably on how long it took to do the painting). Among the three, the earlier is more accomplished, but not necessarily larger. This figure can be compared to the ones in Sorolla's *Pescadores valencianas* (1915). But unlike the Amorsolo, there is no central vertical figure. The women are on the same plane. While there is interest in the clothing, there is no calling attention through bright color. Everything is bathed in color that deprives the painting of drama and fills it with the breeze constantly blowing through the fisher folks of these parts.

Although he may be considered a very distant "alumbrist," Amorsolo did not copy Sorolla. Judging from the originality of his vision, he combined many different tendencies of art during that time, including symbolism. Unlike the non-symbolic Sorolla, there is meaning in Amorsolo, which the viewer, however, determines. There is also sense of drama in Amorsolo, who is in between the grand scenes of Juan Luna and the littleness of photographic slice of life (*Planting Rice*, Fig. 76 in *Fernando Amorsolo*).

AMORSOLO'S MODERNISM

Amorsolo's form of alumbrism alone does not prove his modernity. Most people, even among the educated classes, will ask what modern art means. This paper argues that Amorsolo's kind of modernism is very different from the one described by western historians of ideas as defiance against the idealism of Academism or even of the attempt to be true to nature or even to make visible the inner reality. Like Sorolla's, Amorsolo's realism lacks content and meaning. It is, therefore, at once *not* merely Academic Art, which has an established and over-determined meaning, but also, because of its application of photographic image-cutting, it defies any form of meaning formation. Amorsolo's brand of alumbrism transcends Sorolla's, for it is a realism that resists the convention of established iconography but creates its own iconography towards making room for the subjectivity of the viewer, creating a relational art that is truly Filipino.

The development from Luna to Amorsolo to Edades and to Zobel is one of the most important events in the history of (artistic) ideas in the Philippines. It follows global movements in aesthetic ideas itself—from Academism,¹⁸ to realism, to expressionism and abstractionism. This study would like to show that Amorsolo was a radical break from traditional visualization. Contrary to common understanding of him, he is a truly great modern painter, mainly because he has stood his ground as a realist. When asked what his opinion was on the avant-garde movement happening in art during his time he said:

For me, they have been somewhat revealing. Something which I had hardly thought, which overturned entirely my concept of painting but which I do not think has made

me fall into error notwithstanding the extravagance. I place myself at mid-point between both tendencies. (qtd. in Roces 43)¹⁹

Here was an individual Filipino who knew himself and his own style, and decided categorically to be true to that identity despite all the other emerging styles. Amorsolo chose his own place in the artistic landscape of his time, and consciously *placed* himself in the midpoint between the modernism he knew and the emerging avant-garde. Such a definitive subjective position marks him as a true modernist, and the synthetic niche he has carved for himself makes him truly Filipino, as he breaks the tendency to ride on the trail of fashions abroad. Moreover, local art historians have also inaccurately assumed that realism has stopped developing when Impressionism came to fore, even as Abstractionism itself is called “new realism.” It is an important question to ask how Philippine art has contributed to the development of realism in the twentieth century as well as at the turn of the twenty-first century.²⁰

The second half of this paper argues that the modernity of the vision of Amorsolo is a modernity that is at once a subjective turn commencing from the Cartesian *Cogito*, and the freedom and insolence against Courbet’s notion of man as *imago Dei*. But his is also a Filipino modernism in so far as it allows for a relationship with the viewer to add to the narrative of the painting, making it his own.

DEFYING ICONOGRAPHY

Most of us would think that we would not need a guide to understand an Amorsolo since the paintings were “familiar.” After all, what is there to think about in bucolic scenes of farmers planting rice? But in giving us a sense of the proverbial, Amorsolo actually plays with our notion of the real. Instead of being faithful to reality, Amorsolo, in true Cartesian form, questions and doubts it. He is not a realist in the social realist vein of Antipas Delotavo; neither is he a Nationalist realist, who uses objectivism and kitsch as modes of meaning formation. Amorsolo seduces us, that is, makes us trust him, so we can enter into his world. In the end, what we find is the unfamiliar and uncanny.

An Amorsolo painting deceives us into thinking that we get him, but scrutiny of our hermeneutical methods would prove that we have barely begun to read him. If iconography were the system of fixed meanings in visual language, Amorsolo’s paintings would therefore be anti-iconographic. In Amorsolo, references to traditional iconography will fail to illumine. In the first place, when we go back to the earliest paintings and compare them to the store of images, we notice that there is no way we could have understood them—historically, that is. Iconography tells us

that we understand paintings based on the visual language that art has used from the beginning of history of visual representation. That is, the paintings of Altamira and Lascaux still aid us in our understanding Picasso's *La Guernica*. But if we looked at Amorsolo's earliest paintings, we would see images never seen before in western iconography, the one in which Philippine art has been situated; e.g., the foregrounded "bamboo tree."²¹

His depictions of Mayon Volcano have no other meaning for us except what Amorsolo has given it. The coconut trees, the farmer with his carabao at the back of the group of daintily clad planters, are not icons. They defy iconographic interpretation as there is none in traditional painting, except in Amorsolo itself. The reference is reality, and yet what the painting conveys is unreality or hyper-reality. What does the smoky volcano mean? What do the *salakots* mean? What does the foregrounded coconut tree mean? Nowhere in western art will one resort to understand them. The grubby feet in Millet or Van Gogh would not allow us access into the meaning of the submerged feet of rice farmers in Amorsolo, nor would the bowler hats of Magritte facilitate our interpretation of the *salakots* shining over pink mantles.

Take another example, the man with a guitar has many visual references in western art. But the musicians in the rice field are another story.²² It can be argued that the Amorsolo painting is in the same genre as the Realist paintings of Courbet and Millet. The Amorsolo painting is made stunning by the triumvirate of objects: the *salakot*, the band of rice grains, and the *sampaguita*. Notably, this woman is unlike the other women in art, which is the Virgin Mary or the Greek goddesses. This lady is the so-called *Palay Maiden* (1920), and she is nowhere in western art. We take her for granted (as she is not real), but she is nowhere to be found in the Louvre.

What we see is that while the Amorsolo is familiar, it is also the opposite. There will be no direct reference in iconography for what the painter shows. That is, the aesthetic experience is precisely the feeling of comprehension that is betrayed when hard pressed for articulation. What do the foregrounded bamboo tree, the nipa hut, and the mountain and clouds mean? A scene which is very familiar to us has no set meaning that can be understood in the established iconography.²³ The intelligibility of an Amorsolo is not in the level of iconography, but somewhere else (*D'ailleurs*). For this reason, Amorsolo's art bears the first mark of modernism, that is, there is an ostensive rebelliousness towards the conventions of traditional painting. Amorsolo, despite his non-use of traditional iconography, does not confuse. This is because, referencing Sorolla, he allows the viewer to supply the meaning.

TURN TO SUBJECTIVITY

A turn to subjectivity matches this unconventionality. Amorsolo started to depict his own understanding of the world he found himself in, especially the "objects" of meaningfulness. His

art concretizes the idea that the individual articulates his own vision of the world. This form of subjectivism came very early in the American occupation, and was the fullest expression of the democracy being imposed on the Philippines.

This *mise-en-scene* is not about deception but meaning. A form of realism (*trompe l'oeil art*) may seek to deceive, but in Amorsolo, there is a desire to construct meanings. In his art, there is both the sense of the already known (*cogniti*) and the unknown (*ignoti*). The result is doubt about what is seen with the naked eye. But the key to the rupture is in the alienation most Filipinos have with their own culture. Otherwise, one might think the painting is a sheer representation of reality.

We see this in his portraits, for example *Old Mandarin Gentleman* (1927) at the Yuchengco Museum. In the folds of the Gentleman's angular clothes, one can perceive a bit of Cezanne. Amorsolo might have had this painting executed to attract the Chinese clients to sit for portraits. The man—old, serious, and wise—hints at the alienation that accompanies migration. The interest is in the face, the wide bald spot, and the long, white facial hair. Compare this to *A Chinese Lady in Qipao* (1959). While transparency is evident here, the whole dress, the watch and the ring, the manicured fingers, the earring, and the full-coiffed black hair are lucid and accomplished.

Match that up to *Portrait of Felicing Tirona* (1935) in country attire. The way the painter draws attention to the circularity of the *salakot* that makes her pose awkward is the main draw. This painting is to be viewed as a portrait of an Asian woman, and it has objects of being Filipino: the *salakot*, the *sampaguita*, the bamboo tree at her back, and her so-called "country attire." Nevertheless, let us compare it to paintings of country maidens, for example, Courbet's *Grain Sifters* (1855). Notice the way the middle figure also holds up the circular sifter, but how the face of the female country worker is hidden and bowed. She is not in costume, unlike the Tirona painting. Or compare it to Millet's *The Gleaners* (1857). Again, the faces of the women are not seen, and the clothing is comparable to the Amorsolo.

In Spanish art, however, she might be compared to Joaquin Vayreda's *La Siega* (1881), or Tomas Garcia Sampedro's *A la Caida de la Tarde* (1890), which featured two country maidens strolling back from the fields, with one carrying over her shoulders a huge circular basket, or even Manuel Benedito's *La Pescadora* (1895), with a large basket on her lap (Reyero). Unlike the Amorsolo, these maidens do not look back.

On the one hand, Amorsolo's country maiden is familiar to Filipinos, and yet if we really think about it, we do not know how to situate it in the history of art, that is, if we are even required to do so. We know, however, that we no longer have to busy ourselves with a woman's ethereal presence. Instead, what haunts us is this woman's subjectivity; that is, we are haunted by *who* she is. Behind the illusion, we realize she is *not* familiar (to the countryside): she is one of those aristocratic girls who grew up in the city, and will wear these vestments only as costume. On top

of that, she holds unrealistically these accoutrements emphasizing the fact that she is not used to the countryside. The objects stand in a plane separate from her smile and glowing eyes. She is forever transfixed in this dreamy state, in this excursion, in these occasional trips to the fields; her whole story is in the theatricality of the scene. She is in costume, this is a set up, and the enormous mountain in the background will soon tumble down.

It speaks of the bourgeois' relationship with native objects and rurality, and thus, their relationship with the countryside, the land, the grain, which is one of ostensible separation, if not disdain. For them, these objects are toys and not means of survival. It is very much the attitude of merchants towards poetry—"they are only good for amusement." Ultimately, however, it identifies the woman with the objects—with the *sampaguita* around her neck, for she, too, is a plaything.

Compare this jocularly to the underlying violence in the *Palay Maiden* (1920) who holds the sickle together with the harvested rice. The lucidity of the *baro* is telling, whose meaning we ourselves supply. *Iterum*, we fail when we try to read these paintings using the traditional method of iconography. The references to the visual system are unknown. Positively, we sense that we do understand the paintings even at the turn of twenty-first century. We have always thought we understood Amorsolo because, after all, here is the maiden, her bundle of *palay*, her see-through blouse, underneath which is the pinned *ex votos* and bundled up money. But once we try to articulate what it all means, there is silence. Because unlike the image of the *Mater Dolorosa* or the angel in the *Salubong* (Encounter of Blessed Mother and the resurrected Christ), we become uncertain about the meanings of the images. Here the sense of the imagery eludes us without confounding us.

The same story goes with the washing women paintings for if we look to western art, we will not find any other reference of women washing clothes by the river, accompanied by their round basins and washed clothes.²⁴ What we find in our store of images are references to "women bathing," but not women washing clothes by the river underneath the bamboo tree.

Amorsolo knew this relationship our eyes have with "the native object." Notice the dress of the lady in *Maiden with Lanzones* (1924). We think this dress actually existed, but if it did, it must have caused quite a stir at the market with its blue-violet color and golden yellow sleeves. The portrait is with the lady in an elegant dress conversing with the weave of the basket and the coruscating *lanzones*, and most of all, the fleshiness of the arm and the daintiness of the finger create a dream world (no lady with this skin tone will ever wear this dress or walk with a basket of *lanzones*). The artist makes an identification of the lady, the flesh, the dress, the basket, and the *lanzones*. And, in turn, this is the way to understand the meaning of the *lanzones*, the basket, and the translucent native dress.

The inaccurate feeling of comprehension is in the Filipino's alienation from his/her own culture, a sense of alienation that is akin to the Cartesian subject. One thinks he has seen ladies with *lanzones*, but he has seen only fruit vendors, who are, to be honest, mostly dark and burly males pushing carts of fruit. As in modern philosophy, the alienation leads one to doubt the sense of reality, forcing the painter and viewer to mine their own capacity to imbue meaning. The rupture the paintings create in the viewer's sense of the familiar is an epistemological event.

It is the same experience with the transparency, which is the access to the fleshiness of the woman, beyond the ordinariness of the kitchen, as in *Under the Mango Tree* (1935). We posit the simultaneous identification of the fruit, the weaving, the dress, the nature, and the woman, and presuppose that this is not reality but a dream. We enter into another plane of meaningfulness, namely, the subjective as we focus on the transparent sleeves of the *baro*. Suddenly, the solidity and the coarseness of the objects, finished as they are in the realistic mode, become the fluorescence of the sleeves. The register is an impressionism that allows access to another solid object, namely, the arm of the woman.²⁵ The sense of unfamiliarity and alienation is also a break from a realism that merely wants to depict "what is." It is instead a realism that enters into the subjective, to the *cogito* of Descartes.

RELATIONAL NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Amorsolo gives the impression of understanding by creating familiarity in order to conceal the meaning, the inner subjective sense, which the painting alone knows. This is what makes him a great modernist painter. In *Dalagang Bukid* (1936), we think we have seen this scene, but the urbanite most certainly has not. The unreserved daintiness leads beyond naïve reality: the enigmatic pose, the way she is uncomfortable and familiar with her surroundings. Is she looking at the mountain at the distance or simply posing for the painter? How she contrasts with everything else around her, most especially the raised sickle of her father or uncle; how the golden light contrasts with the shaded foreground; and how she calls attention not to herself but to the *banga*, are in the end the clues to the artifice of the whole imagery. For we have to remember we have seen this *objet* in the other paintings as a kind of device to distract or lend familiarity to the artifice (Figs. 21, 25 in *Fernando Amorsolo*). In the end, we are in an artist's studio, and this lady might really be *sicut* Felicing Tirona who is dressed up as a country maiden. Here we find a visual use of the cut and paste: she is set in in the harvest scene, although when she posed she was sitting on a divan (Figs 23, 24 in *Fernando Amorsolo*).

Another remarkable but and less studied piece is *Independence this Year* (1943). Perhaps one is not readily cued to read this painting because it is a historical painting in a totally different register.

The virtuosity is in the irony: two men laughing, but one is a Japanese premier, and the other is the Philippine president during the Japanese occupation. Vargas' clothing can be contrasted to what he was wearing in the portrait of him, *Chairman of the Philippine Executive Commission* (1943).²⁶ Both laughing, one, however, is bald, the other is with an increasingly white mane from the forehead. The greenness of the Japanese fatigue is made interesting by the colorfulness of the medals on his right breast. The menacing drama is in the crossed leg of the Japanese, who seems to distance himself from the foregrounded Filipino whose back is not rested, a position of inferiority. The all too rounded spectacles of the Japanese have an interesting pose: attention is drawn to him but he bounces that back by his almost homoerotic gaze on the Filipino. Consequently, this painting tells us how the Filipino and the Japanese are, and *vice versa*. Photographic, the image is a slice in time, a moment in history.

Compare it to *Maytime in Antipolo* (1943) and the much later *Tinikling* (1950). Both show a *tinikling* scene, the light and the receding landscape, and the gathered folk with all sorts of fruits in *bilaos*—these elements tell us that this is an Amorsolo, and we understand it as such. The narrative is simple, and the virtuosity is in the light. Moreover, the modernity is in the position of the viewer. Immediately the narrative is told, because the viewer, just as in an Impressionist painting, is able to supply the rest of the story. But there is no mysteriousness unlike in the *Independence This Year* painting. Or is there? The viewer could imagine the sounds of the clattering bamboos and the clapping of the audience. *Barrio Fiesta* (1949; a title that is at once in Tagalog, Spanish, and English) exemplifies Amorsolo's narrative technique. Formally dressed women are followed by a musical band, while a group roasting pig is on the left foreground. The group is looking at the parade headed towards the Church. We think we know this scene, but Amorsolo breaks our complacency as he leads us to the on looking *maglelechon* (roasters), the two kids on looking, the woman in *salakot* looking. At the same time it traumatizes, for the pole holding up the roof that juts out from top left of the frame slices the painting.

Tindahan (1964) is another example of relational narrative technique. The strangest thing about the painting is the old stone church's opened door, and how everything else seems to be happening oblivious to it (this is true in most nearby Church scenes). Here one can say Amorsolo actually redefines the still life, with these almost cubistic fruits referencing Cezanne. The narrative seems familiar, but providing only a few hints, such familiarity is achieved by the viewer's ability to supply the rest of "what's going on."

Sunset (1959) seems to have a program, but it is the viewer who actually creates the story. Is this lady looking at the sunset or at the boat leaving for the night's fishing? Is her husband there? There is trepidation, and certainly no sense of adventure, just the cycle of catching and cooking and eating. Many are unfinished images, except for the coconut tree and leaves, the boat's sail,

and the woman's hair. Amorsolo is able to create enigma—why is she sitting on a boat by herself? Why are those leaves hanging like no one painted them? Isn't she overdressed for the occasion? Notice also the way the *katig* cuts through the canvas, and how the painting itself is not a perfect picture. Almost certainly, there is another story. And so we invent another one: did she just find herself there watching the fisher folk run off into the ocean? Perhaps she is a princess or the *yaya* of the child. There is no *one* story, there is not *one* meaning. What is thought to be known is actually unknown.

What about *Sunduan* (1941), painted at the start of the Japanese Occupation? There seems to be no doubt in the program: a romantic scene with a lover fetching the lady in a Maria Clara dress. If this were a scene culled from the *Noli me tangere*, the man on the left foreground would be Elias, but even this referencing to the revolutionary novel is a product of the viewer's place afforded by the painting itself. But we perceive tension between the man fetching and the lady that is being fetched: we "imagine" what the *alalay* (assistant) is whispering into the lady's ears. Nature makes a cameo appearance through the grass underfoot, which occupies the center of the painting together with the guitarist. The intruding noses of the boats articulate the meaning of the painting, namely, the machistic act of fetching. Unbeknownst to the viewer, however, he or she creates the story from the details scattered in the painting. The story is created by the point of view created by the arrangement of figures that seem to distract from the scene, like the man with the basket at the right foreground who seems to be packing food for the boat trip or perhaps just happens to be there.

RELIGIOUS VIEW

Could the historian of ideas affirm that Amorsolo's modernism include a redefinition of the image of man from *imago Dei* to a free and liberal individual (see *In the Orchard* [1928])? Can one necessarily point to a single meaning of the two baptismal paintings (1948 and 1950)? The first is made strange by the lady buying fruits as the baptismal procession ambled by in front of the stone temple. It is strange in the same way that the exposed breasts²⁷ in the 1948 painting seem to be out of place.

Even the rendition of religious architecture breaks away from the usual meanings accorded it as symbols of religion. Notice how finished the churches are, and normally not the ones without light (*Planting Rice* [1924]). The stone temples are to be contrasted with the *bahay kubos* with their *paawid* roofs. Notice the stone architecture in paintings like *Baptismal of the Eldest* (1959), *Maytime in Antipolo* (1943), *Tinikling* (1950), *Barrio Fiesta* (1949), and *Tindahan* (1964). One might be led to ask whether the church were at the center of rural life. Situated invariably at the upper left of the canvas, one notices that it is the backdrop of festivity. Do these images imply that Amorsolo's

painting bore the idea of man as *imago Dei*? The belfry is almost always the highest point in the paintings, providing height and verticality. In Fig. 55 (*Fernando Amorsolo*), the bamboo pole of the haystack serves this purpose, but it parallels the belfry of the rosy church at the distance. It is interesting that the church is always at the upper register of the painting, sometimes contrasted by the *nipa* hut and the greenery. Unlike in Courbet, absent in Amorsolo paintings are figures of religious leaders like priests and nuns. The interest is in the laity, or if you will, the citizens, happy and dancing wildly with their children. Palpable is the dream aspect of Amorsolo, for the church is never found amidst nature in “real life.” The stone temple is the mark of the break from nature, the center of urbanization and the center of the civilizing task of colonization.

Fig. 54 (*Fernando Amorsolo*) seems to refer to the Marian pilgrimage in May. Noticeable is the tripartite structure of the church, its solidity, and triangularity, and of course its height and superimposing position. The painting might be understood to be divided into two, the lower part where the people are gathered in merriment, and the abandoned strength of the church, marked by red-tiled roofing. Red is not found in the multicolor of the egalitarian gathering down below. This painting also brings to the fore the musicians which also abound in Amorsolo. The caravan scene at the middle left can evoke a medieval band as well as an American frontier pack. Menacing, however, is the date—1943, the height of the Japanese occupation.

Is the painting saying that the church was slowly being left on the periphery? Is the painter making a statement about the Catholic Church by depicting only its base? In Fig 57 (*Fernando Amorsolo*), where the grand and merry procession is clearly heading towards the church, the church stands both at the center and at the margins. The scene is unreal, for the church that is depicted is like an out-of-way sacred space, which is also a nowhere (*nulle part*) in the Philippine setting, for the church is the first thing to be found in a community, having been the focal point of colonial reduction.

The place of worship seems to be at the right place in *Tindahan* (1962), which is surrounded by the store, and situated where even gamblers might be seen. Here the church is seen on top, and only the arch doorway with its shaded entrance is seen. It is, however, in the shadows, and flowers from the adjacent fire tree garnish the front. Not so far, one will locate the *nipa* structure. The community is never on the side of the stone temple but proximate to the *nipa* structure, where nature is also found.

In Fig. 79 ([1944] *Fernando Amorsolo*), a toiling scene is in progress, but on the horizon is a faint suggestion of the city with the distinguishable spires of the church, which might even be that of the San Sebastian. In Fig. 86 ([1924] *Fernando Amorsolo*) the church is right on top of a hill. This one has no tripartite structure and no belfry, but with the red-tiled roof. It is obscured by some tall trees, and there is an overcast sky governing its solidness, which contrasts with the greenery of the

bundle of rice seedlings on the foreground, or the countrified skirt of the lass. They are, however, on the same grid: the basket of rice plant and the church, together with the girl on the foreground, form a triangle. Salvation hovers ominously at a distance.

From this initial analysis, one might propose the idea of a retreat from religion to nature, work, and community (if not eroticism) in Amorsolo. The historian of ideas might suggest that rather than a radical revision, this is a soft questioning of man as *imago Dei*. Then again, the spires of the steely San Sebastian, that ethereal symbol of divine beauty and colonial ambition, stand mightily in Fig. 164 (*Fernando Amorsolo*).

AMBIVALENT MODERNITY

While there is an underlying questioning of the centrality of religion, the religious and traditional worldview continues to be a strong undercurrent in his art. This means that his subjective turn does not lead to a complete subversion of the idea of man as a microcosmos of the divine. Thus, despite the obvious modernism of his art, one can still say that Amorsolo was ambivalent about it, especially since it was associated with the continued presence of a foreign power in the land. We suggest that this ambivalence is felt in his attitude towards abstract expressionism itself, which he never dabbled in, sticking to his own realistic style till the end of his painting life. Such ambivalence produced binary tensions in his art not only between the city and the countryside, but also between progress and nature, subjectivity and community, urban development and agricultural economy.

Rusticity is one of the themes associated with the oeuvre of Amorsolo, which is hardly a modern theme. Nevertheless, his sense of the subjective, that is, the unique place he has created for himself amidst the enormous strides in the global art scene, is palpable even in the most rustic of scenes.²⁸ Despite his individualism, he has continued to uphold the values of the family. Fig. 2 (1948), Fig. 5 (1929), and Fig. 7 (1935) open up a whole re-view of children (*Fernando Amorsolo*). A case in point is the girl in reddish pink in Fig. 69 (1947) who is looking away from the scene of the painting. Although in most cases they are a mere appendage, Amorsolo's children have a way of deconstructing the image, (see Fig. 60).²⁹

Furthermore, despite his transgression of traditional iconography, Amorsolo's oeuvre has defined the iconography of harvest (Fig. 157 in *Fernando Amorsolo*): namely, the large embracing tree over the *nipa* hut, the group of people huddled over their harvest of fruits and vegetables next to a bamboo tree, rice fields yonder, mountains, and clouds.³⁰ The viewers are in the shade, taking refuge in the bamboo grove. Different from the usual harvest scenes in commercial art today, it is

also contrasted to the rice planting paintings (Fig. 158 in *Fernando Amorsolo*). This one has a man playing the guitar while the others were bent planting (de la Rosa's *Planting Rice* [1921]).

For this reason, a painting like *Tropical Landscape* (1931) alludes to “a nowhere” (*nulle part*) and an “elsewhere” (*D'ailleurs*). Filipinos take countryside trips in search of the *Amorsolesque* or understanding the countryside in terms of Amorsolo's art. The idea of a subjective meaningfulness is intelligible in the landscapes; for, unlike Renaissance painting, it has no iconographic sense, the meaningfulness may be a confluence of naturalism, nationalism, bucolism, even colonialism.³¹ For the Spaniards, the Philippines was won for God, the land is made sacred by blood of Christ and the baptismal waters. For this reason, there was a greater sense of retreat and security, stressing the demand to build the stone temples and structures like forts and lighthouses. The American occupants, on the other hand, unconcealed this understanding of the Philippines as tropical paradise—that is, as nature to be studied, understood, and controlled. The notions of nature that come with Hollywoodization and modernization have been brought in the interpretation of the paintings. It becomes problematic to think that we assume an overdetermined meaning to the landscape. Are we so conditioned that even nature paintings mean “something” to us? What makes our contemporary experience (i.e., understanding) of the landscapes even more interesting is that these images assume the sense of un-realism, since “nature” has been completely transformed and rationalized in less than a century. Indeed the landscapes of this period were not paeans to nature but warnings against urbanization. In the history of Philippine art, how soon would the shanty towns of the social realists replace these enthralling images?

For some, Amorsolo's pre-modern landscape is a symbol for contemplation and withdrawal from the world. Our analysis seems to indicate a multiplicity of meanings. He uses the familiar to convey richness of meaning, which arises from the viewer's thinking that he or she is getting what the painting is saying, but in fact he or she is imbuing the art work with his own meaningfulness. *San Francisco del Monte* (1929), for example, allows for the medieval layer in our culture to surface. For Amorsolo allows us a final glimpse (if not an eternal glimpse) of that secluded place which brought the Franciscans to this side of paradise that would eventually become part of Quezon City. For this reason, the Franciscan order thought it would be a good location for a country retreat house. But today San Francisco del Monte has completely lost its isolation and suffers from the massive urban blight. For this reason, we consider Amorsolo's painting either as a dream, a memory, or even a hoax. The same is at work in the painting *Tagaytay* (1941), where there is just a general space that is pictured, not a specific place, with a history. Thus, there is a pretense to the universal, which gives fodder to the romanticism hurled against Amorsolo.

Ultimately, however, the accusation of romanticism arises from the lack of social realism in the landscape art of Amorsolo. The modernism of Amorsolo is probably less certain because

he chose to depict the countryside *falsely* as a haven of Augustinian peace and order, obscuring the social realities, such as poverty and unequal distribution of wealth, and oppressive gender relations.³² His hermeneutic, however, has created space for the viewer's interpretation; rather than conveying a univocal message, the paintings allow even for this bittersweet notion of a peaceful countryside.³³

CONCLUSION

Writing Philippine history of ideas requires that we problematize the discipline of intellectual history itself, and the re-thinking of itself *vis a vis* cultural and social history. Owing to the diversification in the field of history itself, intellectual history in the age of globalization would become interdisciplinary. It would also take into consideration the resistances to the universalizing aspects of modernity by foregrounding local and regional practices. For this reason, the writing of Philippine history of ideas would no longer be simply a rehearsal of the development of philosophy in the Philippines, but also of art, religion, *etc.* Insofar as ideas are translated into political and economic choices, the history of ideas would remain necessary.

The paper has also shown both historically and intellectually how Amorsolo may be considered a modern painter. Amorsolo's art eludes our comprehension because his notion of subjectivity as well as inter-subjectivity transgresses the Cartesian break between subject and object. As a modern painter, he positioned himself as an individualist, but was still able to communicate to his culture. He painted at a time when Philippine culture was just beginning to be the subject matter of culture, and he knew that very few of his countrymen engaged their culture. He trusted, however, that given the right visual intimations, the viewer would be able to situate himself in the world view of the painting—whose meaningfulness did not have any direct references either in world art or in Philippine culture itself, e.g., the “erotic washer woman.” He was, thus, able to meld artifice with reality, familiarity and unfamiliarity, understanding and enigma.

Through the Centennial exhibits, we have begun to understand the vigor of the modernity of Amorsolo. We hope that future studies could point to the invaluable place Philippine art occupies in global culture, for it traverses the world of high art and the world of “lost islands” where everything is flipped about, subverted, and made into an object of play. It is where the mountain serves as background to the coconut tree, and where bare-breasted women attend sacred mass. Amorsolo is a modernist because his own subjective turn allowed for the subjectivity of the viewer, allowing the latter to string the narrative from an apparently contentless tableau. Ultimately his modernity defies just one definition, since it is not a form of cocooning but of relationality. Moreover, future studies could demonstrate that Amorsolo was part of *Sachlichkeit* movement, or

of the pop art movement, or even of the nationalist kitsch, for by then our art scholars would have delved more theoretically into these subjects.

Finally, the point our paper showed that the present-day Filipino thinker could not do away with the consciousness that was contained in the oeuvre of Fernando Amorsolo. A more incisive understanding of the meaning of Philippine modern art will contribute a great deal in the evolution of our consciousness, and thus of the humane progress of our society. Unlike philosophy, Philippine art is readily available. Not easily accessible to citizens are the tools of understanding the modernist consciousness depicted therein. If historians of ideas could provide some theoretical tools in bridging the visual experience with thought, Philippine modern art might have the transformative force it possessed.

NOTES

- 1 See also Allan Megill's "Intellectual History and History," "Coherence and Incoherence in Historical Studies: From the 'Annales' School to the New Cultural History," and J.B. Schneewind's "Globalization and the History of Philosophy."
- 2 See Amy Schmitter's "Representation and the Body of Power in French Academic Painting" and Perez Zagorin's "Looking for Pieter Brueghel."
- 3 What we mean by this form of doing intellectual history may be seen in Felix Ekechi's "The Future of the History of Ideas in Africa," which precisely weaves ritual and dance into intellectual history; see also Elias Jose Palti's "The Problem of 'Misplaced Ideas' Revisited: Beyond the 'History of Ideas' in Latin America."
- 4 Figure numbers refer to the *Fernando Amorsolo Seven-Museum Exhibition*, unless otherwise indicated.
- 5 Although not a systematic study of his realism and modernity, Rod Paras Perez traces continuity between Courbet, Sorolla, and Amorsolo in *Pioneers of Philippine Art: Luna, Amorsolo, Zobel* (46-89).
- 6 "Precisamente por estos motivos de compromisos politico y busqueda de una identidad, el Modernismo en Filipinas adquirira una personalidad propia que se traducira en la idealizacion de la filipinidad. A traves de la creacion de una topica (topoi), filipina, se dara respuesta a la estetica modernista a la vez que al compromiso nacionalista" (Balmori xii-xiii).
- 7 But even in Gatbonton, Javelosa, and Roa's *Art Philippines*, there is no definition of "modernity." It calls Amorsolo romantic, but stopped to relate his romanticism with modernity.
- 8 Take for instance Fabian de la Rosa's *Lavandera* (1930). This is clearly different from Amorsolo's *lavanderas*, e.g., *Woman with Pitcher* (1913), which reminds one of Vermeer—with the pitcher replaced by the *banga* in Amorsolo. There is also the woman with *Palayok*.
- 9 The Romanism, however, required depiction of grand historical scenes (e.g., *Spoliarium*) (Reyero 237-41).
- 10 To what extent interest in interior spaces might represent similar preoccupations about subjectivity require further study.
- 11 Amorsolo's *Katipunero* might even be very significant in terms of iconography of the Katipunan (Fig. 136 in Amorsolo).
- 12 Alfredo Roces astutely stipulates that it was through magazines like Spain's *La Esfera*, England's *International Studio*, America's *Studio* that Amorsolo had his first exposure to the world of "old and new masters" (30). The relationship between the emerging visual culture of the early 20th c. and (Philippine) art presents an interesting sphere of study.
- 13 An important detail on Sorolla is that he has a clear Hispano-American link, which may be the strongest similarity he has with Amorsolo. An interesting detail about Amorsolo is that he is utilized by the American colonizers as a trophy of their occupation of the Philippines.
- 14 Sorolla's aesthetic school is also called *iluminismo* and *naturalismo* (Reyero 347-52).
- 15 "Su defensa de los valores puramente visuales de la realidad provoco que, con frecuencia, la critica viera en su pintura falta de profundidad y contenido" (Reyero 35).

- 16 For this reason, the relationship of the paintings with photography and photo-journalism must be inserted in the discussion. Arising from the alumbriism of Sorolla, which works from the idea of the photographic slice of life, Amorsolo cannot be understood apart from photography. The real proof of his modernism and realism is his reliance on photography. Compare some of the images in Laureano's *Recuerdos Filipinos Album Libro*. For example, *Vendedora de Mangas*—this belongs to turn of the century or early American period. Lo and behold, Amorsolo has a *Mango Vendor*. Another one is *India del campo*. There is a conceit in Philippine art of back turned women with jars, as in Fabian de la Rosa's *Woman with Palayok*.
- 17 Sorolla of course has an American connection, with his works in the Hispanic Society of America; he is often compared with John Singer Sargent (see catalogue of *Sargent-Sorolla* Museo Thyssen-Bernemisza Ministerio de Cultura).
- 18 Juan Luna had his own social realist phase (Gatbonton et al. 65+).
- 19 "He succeeded in making the genre the mean point between tradition and the avant-garde tendencies of his time, but very few really understood what he set out to do" (Paras Perez 56). Paras-Perez concedes that the modernist tendency in Amorsolo still has to be studied more seriously (59).
- 20 Thus, the idea of making a binary distinction between realism and abstraction as in the Metropolitan Museum exhibit needs to be reviewed. Art manuals will feature Mexican realism, but not Philippine realism.
- 21 This might be a reference to Asian art, but whose meaningfulness will have tenor found specifically in Amorsolo.
- 22 What is the status of the musician in Amorsolo? Is he a kind of anti-thesis or foil to the farmer? Is he a kind of objective correlative of the painter? In Fig. 51 (1950), the musicians are always behind the protagonists, but they are visible; in fact, they sort of provide a kind of subtext. In Fig. 54 (1943), an inventory of the musicians and musical instruments in the paintings have to be made. What was their place in the countryside at this time? *El Ciego* (Fig. 56, 1928) is one of the few, if not the only one, that features a musician as subject matter. It looks like a *musikong bumbong* (Fig. 57, 1949). The theme dates back very early; there is a famous picture of this in Laureano's *Recuerdos*. Unlike the farmer or fruit vendor, the musician is always depicted upright; see Figs. 64 (1941), 87 (1952), and 158 (1943). This last painting is in fact also almost about the guitarist accompanying the farmers in their planting.
- 23 Perhaps we look to some visual reference in Japanese or Chinese art. The relationship between Amorsolo's visual language and Asian art has to be studied.
- 24 A theme in Amorsolo is cleanliness which, together with his light-motif and penchant for whiteness, might be an unconscious affirmation of colonial presence.
- 25 First of all, this effect is not found anywhere but in Amorsolo, not even in Sorolla (*Paseo a la orilla del mar* [1909]). Even the transparent or the mellifluous veils hanging from the hats are not rendered in the same fashion as the sleeves in Amorsolo. The veils do not lend us access to another object beyond them. Thus, what an Amorsolo does is really to depict transcendence through the erotic transparency of the sleeves, which his masterful play of light makes even more dramatic and eternally delightful. The idea the painting conveys is that of the photographer studio, where there is a setup, costume, and

scenery. The painting does not convey reality but dream, make-believe—costume play. It is signalled by the light. The same effect is experienced in the Gothic, where light is a cue for the transcendent meaning conveyed by what is seen. And yet there is such thing as the meaning of light in Amorsolo—it is like the light in Sorolla, without determined meaning, allowing objects to luminesce. The religiousness and transcendence of Amorsolo will be the subject of another study.

²⁶ *The Executive Committee* reminds us of Velasquez's portrait of seated popes and bishops. It is interesting to note how we take for granted Amorsolo's presidential portraits, for example *Portrait of Manuel Roxas* (1950). If one studies the whiteness of the shirt and how it relates to the black, there is both a colonial and postcolonial atmosphere. Compare it to the luminous *Portrait of Francis Burton Harrison* (1938).

²⁷ See Miles. The history of the exposed breast in Philippine painting would enlarge the discussion on this issue.

²⁸ A true portrait is that in which the painter and viewer are also present in what is seen. See Fig. 166 (undated, Amorsolo).

²⁹ Or are they? See Fig. 61. For example, compare the corsage in Fig. 169 to the tie in Fig. 170, the lily in Fig. 172, and the pin in Fig. 174, or the flowers in Figs. 1 and 2. The true artistic atmosphere, even colonial and eurocentric in flavor, are in Figs. 30 and 32. The pot of water is the same as the washing. These are nudes, dressed nudes, placed in familiar setting to lure us out of the artifice, to give a semblance of realism: for it is not realism that Amorsolo wants to create but dream: see Fig. 44 (1947) and Fig. 49 (1955-1960). (All Figure numbers in Amorsolo)

³⁰ This is the very point of the curatorial intent of the Metropolitan exhibit, since much of our rural area has been transformed into real estate development. The relationship between the land and architecture is a memory now, while it is "reality" in the time of Amorsolo.

³¹ For this view of the Philippines was convenient [*convenable*] to the Americans. See Fig. 107 in Amorsolo.

³² The Lopez Museum exhibit has insinuated Amorsolo's personal relationships with sympathizers of Socialism. He illustrated a work by Lope K. Santos.

³³ It becomes evident that Amorsolo revised the notion of modernity as the break between subject and object. Amorsolo found himself able to define his own subjectivity (understood as style) but he was also to contribute to the definition of what may be called "national identity." How his art has shaped a brand of Filipino identity requires a separate study, but what we have indicated as relational narrative technique arising from a form of subjective hermeneutics might be closer to what is considered as "Asian aesthetics," if not to Filipino aesthetics. Furthermore, it has to be said that one might consider his modernity ambivalent only from a strictly western view of modernity (Sasaki).

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