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100 Katao, Taka

By JASER A. MARASIGAN

PAETE, a small town in Laguna, is home to at least two crafts-making traditions — woodcarving and papier-mache, locally known as “taka.” These traditions date back to about 100 years ago, as evidenced by generations of families who have been engaged in these businesses.

As the University of the Philippines (UP) continues its centennial celebration, it pays tribute to this century-old tradition with an exhibit entitled “Isang Daang Katao, Isang Daang Taka” slated on Sept. 5 to 20, at the Sala’am Conference Room of the Romulo Hall in UP Diliman, Quezon City.

The Asian Center in cooperation with Manlilikha Artisans’ Support Network and the Entrepreneurial Management Class 2012 of the University of Asia and the Pacific, mount this exhibit showcasing 100 papier mache pieces fashioned in different ways by 100 individuals that include artists, writers, civil servants, and professionals who are mostly UP alumni.

“Papier mache is a traditional craft-making practice in Paete that we want to promote. Part of the organization’s vision is to one day see a merging of contemporary art practice and traditional art. And that’s exactly what happened here,” says Mitzie Icasiano, one of the proponents of Manlilikha.

By using traditional crafts as a medium for artistic expression and creativity, not only is the local craft of taka making promoted but so is its possibility for contemporary engagement is exposed.

“By the mere gathering of people from different walks of life, that variety of crowd for a single cause which is heritage preservation, it is like UP na halo-halo ang mga tao pero isang komunidad pa rin yan. This event is a people’s effort sharing one cause. And the idea of UP is much the same,” says Icasiano.

Among the 100 personalities participating in the exhibit are National Artist Abdulmari Asia Imao, Sen. Loren Legarda, activist Dinky Soliman, editorial cartoonist Jess Abrera, and writer Jessica Zafra.

Other artists and designers include John-Pete Agcaoili, Christine Amador, Bayang Barrios, Plet Bolipata, Elmer Borlongan, Noel Cabangon, Jonathan Ching, Christina Dy, Joy Fabe, Noell El Farol, Lanelle Abueva-Fernando, Carlos ‘Totong’ Francisco II, Ronnie Lazaro, Buwi Meneses, Gabe Mercado, Michael Muñoz, Nunong Olinares, Gary-Ross Pastrana, Ebok Pinpino, Jose Tence Ruiz, Don Salubayba, Kusina Salud, Jon Santos, Ciara Marasigan-Serumgard, Josie Sison, Kate Torralba, Keiye Miranda-Tuazon, Lour De Veyra, Kyo and Chitoy Zapata.

“We want to see contemporary artists do traditional crafts-based work. In this case, you will see a wide variety of taka versions that you could possibly imagine!” says Icasiano.

“We also have a lot of young artists participating

maiden, and other farm animals. At the height of the demand for papier mache for export in the 1980s, taka producers also fashioned reindeer and Santa Claus, angels and cherubs, fishes and other marine life forms like starfishes and shells, fruits, and other animal forms.

This fundraising project is a concrete expression of support for Paete’s taka making. For this reason, the organizers chose two traditional taka forms, as base for the artworks — the country maiden (dalagang bukid) and the horse.

The participants were given a month to finish their decorated taka and the option to price his/her own work or grant this right to the project organizer. The items will be auctioned off through a process of silent bidding.

“If you think of contemporary art, or you see a painting, you’d know it’s an Amorsolo. But when you see a craft, you don’t say that it’s by a certain person, anonymous *yung tao*. We want to change that.”

Apart from helping the artisans, we would also like to look up crafts collection in the country. If we could document it, let’s document it. Why? Because usually the crafts collection that are old, whatever is there, you don’t see them anymore,”

says Icasiano.

INTEGRATING CRAFTS INTO ART EDUCATION

Manlilikha plans to get financial assistance to fund its development of a crafts education curriculum. This aims to integrate Philippine crafts with formal art instructions in schools.

“Young people now are not aware of the traditional crafts. When I talk to them about traditional crafts, they look at me with a blank face. They lack exposure to these things. It’s not because they’re not interested. It’s simply because they were never brought to those places, they never heard about them. When you switch on the TV, what do you find? *Hindi naman* pottery of Ilocos Norte. The art subjects in schools, they don’t even have the traditional crafts education. It’s not a surprise that young Filipinos are removed *kasi sa eskwelahan pa lang*

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NATIONAL ARTIST Abdulmari Asia Imao expresses the Muslim heritage in his taka artwork.

like Leona Garcia, a Phillip Morris art awardee; Lena Cobangbang, Wire Tuazon. We have three artist collective joining, Neo Angono, Dakila, and KSKP. We also have National Artist Abdulmari Imao and his son Juan. Another sculptor is Peter de Guzman who is known for making the Ninoy Aquino monument in Makati,” shares Icasiano.

Taka making is well-linked to the art of woodcarving as the *takaan* (mold) is made of wood. Among the best selling taka are in the form of horses, country

English student says...
...to improve...
...effort



‘DALAGANG BUKID’ as interpreted by Senator Loren Legarda (center); (from left) designer Kate Torralba and civil society leader Dinky Soliman.



TAKA ART by (from left) singer Bayang Barrios, Buwi Meneses of Parokya Ni Edgar, writer Jessica Zafra, comedian Tado Jimenez, and artists Lyra Abueg-Garcellano and Vic Balanon.

Sanso tells Visayas art students: 'Dare!'

Sanso tells Visayas art students: 'Dare!' ...



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kulang na," relates Icasiano. Although there is crafts education, specifically in public schools curriculum, Icasiano still feels that it is not enough.

"You teach the kids how to do it, but you have to tell them the context – *saan ba galing, saan kinukuha yung materials, sino yung mga actual weavers, may nabubuhay pa ba. Yung mga ganon. So kulang. Pero it's interesting to do something about that kasi maraming pwedeng gawin.*"

Aside from exhibition projects to promote artisans and their works, Manlilikha also explores new markets, research and collection of data about crafts to aid its development. They also do cultural industry market studies, and conduct training in design innovation and business management for artisans. The group also holds crafts tours for students to enhance their knowledge on the country's crafts industry and the preservation of this heritage.

"We bring student groups to craft making sites like Paete in Laguna, Ilocos Norte for pottery, Sagada for weaving, Banaue for wood carving, etc. Part of our educational thrust is to bring students to the actual craft sites. *Kasi iba yung nakikita mo, sa nakikihalubilo ka sa mga tao.* You get to understand their sentiments and you see their working conditions. Exposure trip in a cultural heritage point of view. *Dalhin mo sila dun para makita nila kung paano sila nabubuhay,*" Icasiano says.

Surprisingly, not only the Fine Arts students book these crafts tours but also Business students. "It's great because, later



HORSE TAKA ART by dentist Al Nepomuceno.

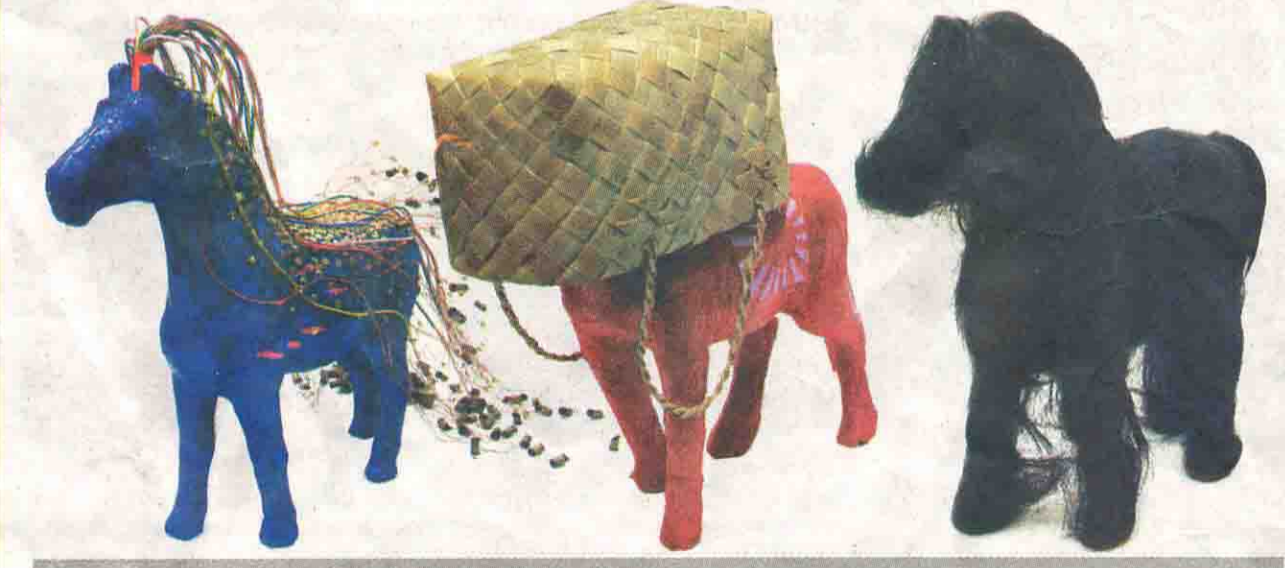
on they can be social entrepreneurs. We need not study art using only Western art. We can study art using crafts. Before you lose them, do something about it, write about it. That's why the organization is also about documenting, mostly old pieces. There's so much work to be done. You have to start with the school system.

It's my advocacy, but I can only do so much. If you really want to have a wide range, long-term effect, you really have to go to the schools," she says.

A book, jointly published by Fabe Books and Publications and Manlilikha, will also be launched on opening day, featuring 100 *taka* works and its designers. Proceeds of the book and artworks will go to Asian Center's exhibition projects, and the outreach and heritage preservation activities of Manlilikha.



'DALAGANG BUKID' by UP Fine Arts graduate Joy Fabe.



TAKA ART by (from left) sculptor Peter de Guzman; TV personality Gabe Mercado; and painter Michael de Gusman who used real human hair on his artwork.

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