

# Indigenous art at the Philippine Exposition of 1887

Arguments for an ideological and racial battle in a colonial context

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*The Philippine Exposition was held in Madrid in 1887 with the aim of increasing commercial and economic relation between the archipelago and the metropolis, but also with the objective of showing its indigenous population to the Spaniards. In this sense, one of the Exposition sections was devoted to fine arts of the Philippines. Assessment of the artistic quality of works of art exhibited was the subject of very disparate interpretations. For conservative Spanish critics – and even for some liberals – the low quality of the woodcarvings was presented as a consequence of the inherent abilities of the Filipinos, and this circumstance was explained exclusively in ethnic terms. However, for some liberal Spanish critics and, above all, for members of the Filipino intellectual elite – the ilustrados – the responsibility for this artistic underdevelopment lay with the Spanish colonial system, and more specifically with the Spanish regular clergy, whose educational strategy was basically aimed at the repression of Filipino intellect.*

SPAIN was only a second-rate colonial power during the second half of the nineteenth century, but it still held on to two important overseas territories: the Spanish Antilles and the Pacific archipelagos (the Philippines, Marianas, Carolinas and Palaos Islands). It was precisely at that time, in the late 1880s, in the context of an expansionist phase of western imperialism, that the weak Spanish colonial empire suffered the most serious threat to its own existence in the distant oceanic possessions – leaving aside, of course, the events of the period of 1896–8 that led to the loss of all these colonies. We are concerned here with the Hispano-German conflict in the Carolinas, a conflict with roots in the distant past, but which exploded in August 1885, to be resolved through the mediation of Pope Leo XIII. Although the problem was favourably settled from the Spanish point of view (though not without some concessions), the Spanish administration feared the expansionist ambitions of the western powers in the Pacific which might affect the Philippines in one way or another. The Spanish felt it necessary to reinforce their domination of the small oceanic archipelagos, but were even more concerned with achieving a definitive consolidation of their colonial presence in the Philippines. Indeed, this was a necessary strategy, for although Spain had

administered the Philippine Islands for more than three centuries, factors such as their distance from the Spanish mainland (especially before the opening of the Suez Canal), the very limited level of Spanish colonization (there were never more than some thousands of Spaniards in the Philippines) and the dominance of the religious administration – the Spanish regular clergy – over the civil administration had converted the Philippines into a somewhat peculiar colony or ‘overseas province’, still largely unknown to the Spanish people and scarcely linked economically and commercially to the mother country.

Structural problems of this kind, together with questions of an economic and political nature, made it necessary and desirable that Spain should intervene in a decisive fashion. The personal intervention of Víctor Balaguer, the Catalan politician who held the Overseas Ministry, provided the definitive impulse to the idea of organizing in Madrid some kind of celebration or event to draw attention to the Archipelago and to modernize the colonial relationships. The exposition format was the favoured solution.

The Madrid Exposition of 1887 followed a model that had become prevalent in many parts of Europe

and America by this time. In featuring inhabitants of the colonies it was closer in character to the universal expositions than to the exhibitions organized by private entrepreneurs in which 'exotic' and 'primitive' peoples were shown in inhuman conditions, but in other respects it was not completely comparable to other world fairs. Indeed, even though it is evident that the Philippine exhibition was inspired by the Amsterdam Colonial Exposition of 1883 in including areas and elements to be presented in a public display of a colonial society – with the participation of indigenous peoples, including individuals considered as 'wild people' – the exposition of 1887 was radically different from those, and certainly from other contemporary expositions, in the ideological concept that underpinned the event. The arrangement in Amsterdam, characterized by a very rigid and vertical colonial structure in both practical and symbolic terms, was replaced in Madrid by a more horizontal and open form of articulation. On the other hand, the brutality documented in similar exhibitions in other European countries during those years was almost completely absent in Madrid, though this affirmation does not mean that Madrid was free of the negative presentations associated elsewhere with the exhibition of human beings – human beings shown only for their physical appearance. Indeed, three of the Filipinos who arrived in Spain died there.

If we examine in some detail the contents of the Exposition, we can see that one of the eight principal sections – geography, population, agriculture, industry, army, etc. – was reserved for culture, education and fine arts. On the whole, and despite the specific appraisal of the fine arts below, this section displayed the limitations of the Spanish colonial system in the Philippines. Some examples of Philippine journalism were exhibited, as well as publications written by members of Spanish regular clergy and secular authors, most of them related to the study of the languages and folklore of the archipelago. Also displayed were some travel books, collections of photographs and statistics on education. However, most of the *ilustrados* – Filipino natives who had been educated according to western models, many of them with university degrees from Spain or other European countries – were not represented at the exposition, in spite of their having already published a number of works: we refer here to authors such as Graciano López Jaena, Gregorio Sancianco and José

Rizal. Besides, they were not invited to collaborate in any organizational part of the event. Apart from this, in the section devoted to 'books of a scientific or literary nature' published in the islands, the former category was entirely absent for the simple reason that the books did not exist. This can be explained by the fact that the Spanish university teaching model was essentially isolated from the scientific world, a situation promoted by the practice of the Spanish regular clergy, who were responsible for education on the Islands. Of course, this lack of scientific publications gave rise to dispute between the Spanish and the *ilustrados* concerning the abilities and aptitudes of the Filipinos. For the Spanish, the *indios* (that is, the Filipinos) were responsible for this fiasco – if indeed it really was a fiasco and not an inevitable situation – neither the Spanish administration nor the regular clergy bore any responsibility for it. The *ilustrados* maintained, however, that the Spanish colonial system and the regular clergy were indeed responsible for the situation, and for the consequent repression of Filipino intellect.

But in the realm of valuations placed on Filipino aptitudes and of interpretations of Spanish policy in the archipelago, the world of the fine arts was much more positive than science and technology. The presence of the fine arts was not fortuitous: in practically all of the expositions held during those years, whatever their theme and scope, we find a section devoted to the exhibition of works of art. The 'most sublime expression of human spirit', the fine arts, were in some ways more important for the host country organizing a world fair than was the display of trade or industry: works of art formed in a sense the most important proof of national development, a development that was not only material but also spiritual. The Philippine Exposition forms a good example of such a situation, but in this case, the presence of works of art was reserved for those executed by Filipino artists – although works on Philippine themes by Spanish artists were also included. The aim of the Spanish administration was to demonstrate the level of development reached by the Filipino indigenous population in this cultural area, a level reached, obviously, thanks to the civilizing and educating role of the religious orders and to Spanish colonial policy since the sixteenth century.

Although it is possible to detect in this section devoted to the fine arts the presence of some handi-

crafts, nearly all the works of art shown were paintings and sculptures, most of them oil paintings and woodcarvings (Fig. 1). Around the end of the nineteenth century the concept of art prevailing in Europe corresponded to the theoretical and ideological programme designed by the intellectual and ruling classes of a white, western, Christian and 'civilized' society. Today the situation has scarcely changed. In this context, painting and sculpture were perceived as the creative areas *par excellence*, the only true art; the remainder could be described as at best local handicrafts. For this reason, everything that we would consider today as indigenous art – both ritual and functional – was exhibited outside the fine arts section. Under these conditions only a colonial and westernized indigenous art was valid because it simplified comparisons between Filipinos and Spaniards, between the so-called primitive and the purportedly civilized.

It is unquestionable that among all the works exhibited in 1887, the oil paintings of the Filipino painter Juan Luna y Novicio (1857–99) were the most important. Luna gained a reputation in Spain from the end of the 1870s, but it was only in 1884 that he reached the peak of his popularity and success. In that year he won a first-class gold medal at the National Fine Arts Exposition with a picture

entitled *Spoliarium*<sup>1</sup>, a picture that was also displayed with success in Paris and Rome. By 1887 Luna was a famous artist, whose participation at the exposition outshone all others.

Luna presented three paintings at the Philippine Exposition: *The Death of Cleopatra* – or, simply, *Cleopatra*, *Charing*<sup>2</sup> and *Island of Guideca*. The first was his greatest and most important work; nevertheless, it provoked marked controversies: if we read the reviews of the official guide, we can see that critics' doubts and even outright hostility were caused by the picture's advanced composition. This experience was to be repeated when Luna undertook an assignment on behalf of the Spanish Senate to paint a picture of the battle of Lepanto. The second painting exhibited by Luna is listed as *Charing* in the Exposition catalogue and represents a young *mestiza* 'making herself a *pusod* or combing her hair'. Some Spanish critics accused Luna of 'forgetting' the appearance of a true Filipina and of representing her with the forms and proportions of a European woman in this work. The third work was a seascape, conventionally painted, but of inferior quality to the first two.

Although Luna's paintings outshone the other pictures exhibited, we have to remember that another important Filipino painter took part in the exposition. He was Félix Resurrección Hidalgo y Padilla<sup>3</sup>

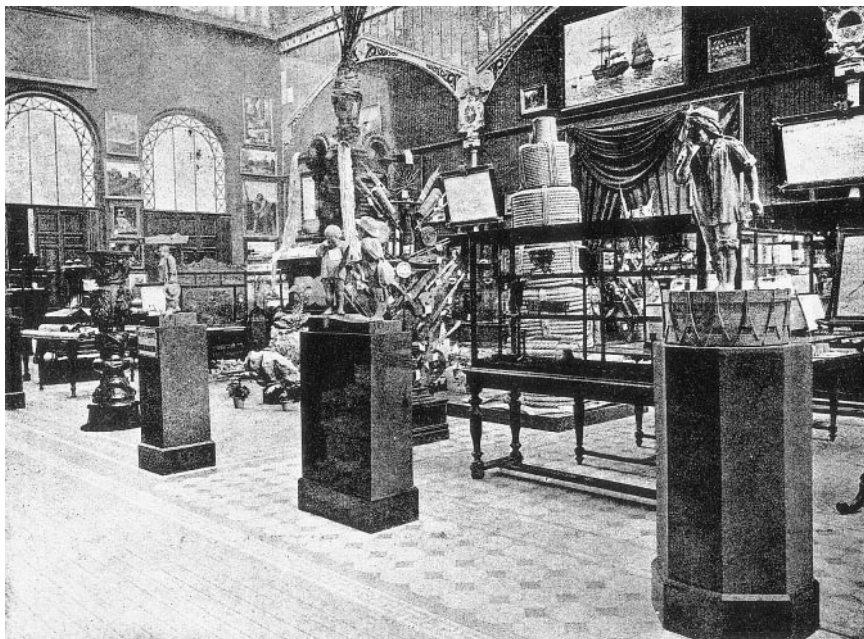


Fig. 1. Eighth section room (culture and fine arts) at the 1887 Philippine Exposition. Photograph, Laurent y Cía (Archivo Ruiz Vernacci, Instituto del Patrimonio Histórico Español).

(1855–1913), the second most famous Filipino painter of the period. According to the official catalogue, he showed two oils: a ‘Landscape representing a Philippine river’ and *La barca de Aqueronte* (A boat on the Acheron).

The other Filipino artists presented at the Exposition had clearly grown apart from Luna and Hidalgo. Years afterwards, the Spanish critic García Llansó – in his book on the *Museo-Biblioteca de Ultramar* (the Overseas Museum and Library)<sup>4</sup> – described as ‘mediocre’ all the paintings conserved in the Museum, most of them received from the Exposition. He singles out only the works signed by Miguel Zaragoza, Félix Martínez and Rafael Enríquez – the first Creole, the other two indigenous Filipino artists. We can share this appraisal today. Other pictures were exhibited but they were of inferior quality to those mentioned above; for this reason, they are now considered to be of only documentary and historical interest. Some of the artists – all of them Filipinos – were students at the Painting Academy of Manila; Telesforo Sugang stood out since he exhibited a great number of pictures and because he received financial support from the Manila city council in order to complete his studies in Madrid. Among all these pictures of inferior quality we find several portraits of Philippine and Chinese men and women, some still lifes, and various oil paintings of Philippine scenes and religious subjects. On the other hand, the Spanish Overseas Ministry exhibited four pictures without giving any information on their authors: one oil painting ‘with the inscription *In hoc signo vincis*’, another ‘representing a warrior’, a third with a naked woman and another ‘with the view of a Philippine village’. It is also interesting to note that the Jesuits, specifically the Superior of the Mission of the Company of Jesus, presented three oils that showed natives of Mindanao; this was the land where the most important missionary activity of Jesuits took place, although they had educational centres in Manila and in other Philippine towns and villages.

The area for sculpture was also large. According to the official guide, many of the works presented ‘compete in merit and value’, although this opinion was not shared by other writers. The editor of the guide specially emphasizes the works of the Filipino sculptors Isabelo Tampingco and Ciriaco Gaudínez. The first exhibited some sculptures and ornamental

carvings from a church that the Jesuits were building in Manila; a figure of St James the Apostle was the most interesting of all. As for Gaudínez, he was the author of five woodcarvings of allegorical Philippine figures, a bust in wood of the Archbishop of Manila, Fr Pedro Payo, a medallion in marble of St Teresa, and two tables carved in relief, the first of which represented a parody of Juan Luna’s *Spoliarium* and the second one a bust of the same painter.

Among the remaining sculptures exhibited by Filipino artists may be mentioned the woodcarvings by Ciriaco Arévalo, Crispulo Jocson and Vicente Francisco; the last-named travelled in person to Spain with the Philippine delegation invited to the exposition. The official guide and the contemporary press had a very high opinion of a woodcarving of Our Lady of Sorrows, whose author was unknown; it was from the Paete school, in the Philippine province of La Laguna. The editor of the Madrid newspaper *El Globo* wrote of this work that it was the only one that could be redeemed from among the numerous religious sculptures exhibited: most of them were such that ‘they would suffice to convert the most devout person, as long as he had something of an artistic soul, into a furious iconoclast’.<sup>5</sup>

Before we examine the reactions caused by these paintings and sculptures on contemporary Spanish society, we must mention briefly the special nature of all these works of art. If among the oil paintings we find a majority of scenes of Philippine natives and landscapes, most of them of a more or less descriptive or informative kind and of variable quality, all the woodcarvings displayed a pronounced allegorical character. From an academic and external perspective, it is evident that the simplicity of these allegories obliges us to speak of a moralizing objective. This is clearly the case with the works of Ciriaco Gaudínez. The titles of his works are illuminating: *La educación de los pueblos destierra sus pasiones* (The people’s education banishes their passions), *La superioridad determina el triunfo* (Superiority determines the victory) and *El mérito de la virtud no consiste en la ostentación* (The merit of virtue does not lie in ostentation). The first (Fig. 2) represents a girl who leaves her games on the ground and lazily embraces a doll while she peruses a pamphlet or book. In the second, two children are engaged in some unidentified activity, one of them, almost naked, see-



Fig. 2. *La educación de los pueblos destierra sus pasiones.* Woodcarving by Ciriaco Gaudínez exhibited at the 1887 Philippine Exposition (A. García Llansó, *El Museo Biblioteca de Ultramar*. Madrid, 1897).

mingly holding a cob of maize; perhaps they are competing for the corn, or one of them is offering it to the other. The third work shows a figure on a drum.

Another example of moralizing sculpture is provided by the work exhibited by Manuel Flores, a native of Manila, entitled *¿Quién vive? ¡España!* (Who goes there? Spain!). This is a sculptural group comprising two figures, each representing one part of the title. The question *Who goes there?* corresponds to 'a native guard holding a spear in his right hand'; while the password *Spain!* corresponds

to 'a native woman who lights with a torch the fields shrouded by the shades of ignorance'. This stirring and 'patriotic' interpretation was provided by the Spanish authors Flórez and Piquer.<sup>6</sup>

The religious sculptures and the portraits and busts were no less subordinated to the social and colonial status quo. A bust of the minister Víctor Balaguer carved by the Filipino Eulogio García included the following inscription: 'Your name will be remembered. The Philippine Arts are grateful.' Flórez and Piquer make the inevitable 'patriotic' remark:<sup>7</sup>

In those words is clearly reflected the gratitude that Filipinos show to the distinguished poet [the minister] who opens the doors of progress to those artists, of whom the majority work by instinct, without rules to guide them, to improve their works. Today they acknowledge him who opens their eyes; they will bless him tomorrow, when education shows them the benefits they have achieved.

This is an essentially colonialist comment rather than a review. Flórez and Piquer, unlike other critics, are not openly hostile to Filipino art; they do not mention inferiority, but judge the art on instinct rather than talent. For them, Filipino art provided, primarily, examples of the level to which art had risen indigenously on the Philippine Islands, and to which it might aspire with Spanish support. It is clear that both critics were aware of the limitations of the Filipino artists, but they also show an awareness that prospects for progress are more important and relevant than submission to the colonial order as displayed by the sculptures on display. What might be interpreted as a moralizing and submissive form of art was interpreted by Flórez and Piquer as the clearest example of the Filipino debt to Spain.

However, it is evident that the apparent simplicity of the sculptures – and the fact that they were carved out of wood, a medium considered much less important than stone or metal – provided a perfect excuse for some of the Spanish critics to attack and to denigrate these works and, through them, the whole of Filipino indigenous society. Oil paintings did not enter into this critique since in spite of the fact that some pictures of very low quality were exhibited, Filipinos had already proved their artistic potential through the work of Luna and Hidalgo, both of them of ‘pure Malay race’. For this reason, pictures could be reviewed only from an academic and formal perspective, as described above.

But the reviews of Filipino woodcarving were not all alike. Conservative critics saw the limitations of the sculptures on show as undeniable proof of the low level of aptitude – lacking any prospect of improvement – of the Filipinos, an unavoidable consequence of ‘racial limitations’. The success of Luna and Hidalgo did nothing to temper this discredit; it seems that the critics considered them as two exceptional cases in Filipino cultural history. Various examples of these conservative opinions could be mentioned, but all are extremely crude and simplistic. Nevertheless, it should be acknow-

ledged that no detailed criticisms of the quality of Filipino works of art exhibited at the exposition have been found in the conservative press. Filipino intellectual and artistic achievement was usually looked down upon, but this sentiment flowed in a very erratic way and was hardly ever presented in a coherent and academic structure. Some understanding of what conservative critics thought about Filipino art can be gained from the ideas expressed by Wencesalo E. Retana, one of the Spanish writers strongly opposed to the Filipino *ilustrados* during part of his life. The text in question is a paper by Retana in which he comments on the unveiling of a group carved in wood that was erected in 1894 in Paete, in the Philippine province of La Laguna, in honour of the Queen Regent of Spain, the director of civil administration Angel Avilés, and the Spanish liberal politicians Antonio Maura and Segismundo Moret.<sup>8</sup> Except for the Queen, all of these figures were fiercely hated by Spanish conservative writers and politicians. On that occasion, the *ilustrado* Pedro A. Paterno delivered a speech on the importance of the Paete woodcarving tradition and the importance of the Philippine municipal reform initiated by Antonio Maura. Paterno said, among other things, that the Filipinos were ‘allies [of Spain] and always free . . . [and] will keep the blood agreements with faith and perseverance’. Though Retana’s objective was to deny the validity of that ‘embarrassing’ reference – since he considered that blood ties for the early period of Spanish conquest were only made to satisfy a ‘brutal indigenous usage’ – he seizes the opportunity to criticize the sculpture being unveiled, and the Paete woodcarving tradition as a whole. We should not forget that most of the carvings exhibited in Madrid belonged to that tradition. Retana’s conclusion is that these works were not ‘true art’.

As far as the Spanish liberal critics are concerned, we can scarcely find any serious and reasoned argument about the artistic level reached by the Filipinos. Alfredo Vicenti is one of the few liberal reviewers to talk about Filipino art with impartiality. He acknowledged the childishness of most of the woodcarvings and the singular nature of the titles used by the Filipino artists, but he also considered that all of this was the result of the educational limitations endured by the Filipinos, the consequence of the ‘indigestible pedagogues [the priests] responsible for maintaining and encouraging Filipino

capacity and intelligence' who instil in the student that the 'healthy realistic trend needs to have a symbolic purpose', and Vicenti suggested that this symbolism is reduced to mere stupidity.<sup>9</sup> He wrote that some of the sculptures exhibited showed that their makers had 'ability and instinct', but that in the end all of them 'become mere craftsmen' (*imagineros*), not real artists.<sup>10</sup> What is lacking is freedom, broadmindedness and genuine artistic education. The blame lies not with the Filipinos, but with the priests who control their lives and who stultify their intellectual development.

We should also include under the heading of a reflexive liberal ideology a sarcastic review in the satirical weekly *La Avispa* (The Wasp), in a special issue of 30 June 1887 devoted to the Philippine Exposition. The text is biting and accurate, but it never resorts to racial contempt. On the work of Gaudínez entitled *El arraigo de las costumbres* (The rooting of customs) (Fig. 3) – in which a man carrying a small coffin with the lifeless body of his son is represented – the newspaper comments that 'the author does not distinguish between potatoes and the dead'. The bust of Fr Pedro Payo – another woodcarving by Gaudínez, which had been cracked by the dry air – was designated by *La Avispa* as a 'puff-pastry bust'. And on the anonymous Our Lady of Sorrows cited above, the magazine said that 'the crystallized stone balls of the Segovia Bridge [in Madrid] are rolling down the cheeks of the Mother of God', referring to the enormous size of the Virgin's tears. As we can see, there is no reference here to the artists' ethnic origin. It would be possible to find contemporary comments in a similar vein on Spanish works of art, with not very different assessments, since serious and satirical art reviews were then very popular in newspapers.

Most remaining liberal criticism cannot be compared to the relatively benevolent reviews of Vicenti or the sarcastic but kind commentaries of *La Avispa*. Other critics clearly held a more conservative view. Thus, the Spanish liberal writer García Llansó<sup>11</sup> declares – in his book about the Overseas Library and Museum of Madrid, most of whose pictures and woodcarvings came, as already mentioned, from the Philippine Exposition – that the art section is 'deficient, with no real artistic character'; he also claims that these oil paintings and woodcarvings were 'creations of an incipient art, the product of an

education of a kind not yet assimilated to ours. There is something in this art that shows infantile and wrong indigenous plastic concepts, which is fond of inventiveness, but lacks the lines or tones that demonstrate the personality and the character of the artist.' García Llansó makes no reference to the educational and social limitations imposed on the Filipinos by the Spanish friars. To him, Filipino native artists seem to be solely responsible for their own lack of development.

An earlier text written by another liberal author on the Filipino art exhibited in 1887 gave a somewhat more complex argument than this. Though not directly and exclusively related to the Philippine Exposition art collection, it is interesting because the author – the Spaniard Manuel Creus Esther<sup>12</sup> – takes the Filipino art exhibited that year as a pretext for a study and evaluation of 'Filipino art' in general. Creus's 1888 paper was written at a time when the Philippines and Philippine subjects were beginning to be taken seriously in Spain. The Philippine Exposition of 1887 had just finished, the archipelago was again being exhibited at the Barcelona Universal Exposition of 1888, and Balaguer's Museum of Vilanova i la Geltrú, in whose bulletin Creus published his paper, had already formed a very good collection of Philippine objects. An economist and lawyer, Creus was a long-standing friend of Balaguer. He was a life member of Balaguer's Museum and he was also editor of the Museum Bulletin for a decade. His ideology was in theory liberal and progressive.

The article by Creus which we consider here is the third of a series on Filipino art and is devoted to painting, sculpture and the theatre. The first two articles were on architecture and some minor arts, and they had already presented some criticism, but it is the third paper that shows more clearly than the others the extent of liberal analysis of Filipino artistic aptitudes and even of Filipino nature. Creus analysed these matters in an unusual way. In the last paragraph, the author apparently comes to a positive conclusion on Filipino art: 'This is, in short, what we can call Filipino art; an art that represents one of the best achievements of the Spanish colonial task: the assimilation of the native, not the annihilation of the savage.' But Creus had earlier written something very different. He wrote that Filipino theatre 'has little literary value', that 'really indigenous' Filipino



Fig. 3. *El arraigo de las costumbres*. Woodcarving by Ciriaco Gaudínez exhibited at the 1887 Philippine Exposition (A. García Llansó, *El Museo Biblioteca de Ultramar*. Madrid, 1897).

painting is merely decorative and ‘rudimentary’ and that ‘it lacked good taste’. Finally, with reference to the *anitos*, he comments ‘the primitive and typical Filipino sculpture is today just as it was in Magellan’s times’.<sup>13</sup> And, when discussing the traditional groups of small figures carved in wood that represent popular scenes and people, Creus described them as ‘naive woodcarvings that remind us of the clay figures which were used in the Nativity scenes of long ago’.

How is it possible, then, that after making such remarks, Creus finishes his article in such a positive

way? It is worth trying to find an explanation. Creus claimed that the Spanish colonial administration had been developing an assimilationist and not annihilationist policy in the Philippines. However, it seems that in fact this policy had only limited success. Although Creus’s article ends with such a contradictory conclusion, his own words show that the Spanish colonial policy in the Philippines was neither assimilationist nor annihilationist. Its main objective seems to have been to keep the indigenous population isolated from modernization or any liberalizing processes. Obviously, this would involve the stand-



still of Filipino art, of the work of the Filipino artists and the whole of Filipino social life. Vicenti concluded something similar, but he explained it with different reasons. Creus's explanation has a pronounced racist and determinist nature. His theory denies the possibility of progress in Filipino art; his own words confirm his derogatory opinion not only of Filipino art, but also of the Philippines and the Filipinos:

Due to the fact that the fine arts are a symbol of independence, the result of original energy, a sign of progress and freedom, we cannot call Filipino indigenous painting, sculpture and music liberal arts. The limited intellectual development of most Filipinos, their poor creative ability, the dependency in which they were born and live, the humble condition in which they vegetate and the small share of modern culture that has come their way, all of these circumstances are the reason for the little variation achieved by Filipino art over the centuries.<sup>14</sup>

Creus's comments do not explain why Philippine society did not follow the path of progress and freedom. The same sentiments occur in García Llansó's book on the Overseas Museum and Library. Undoubtedly, most liberal writers at that time would have considered, to a greater or lesser degree, that the Spanish regular clergy had been responsible for Filipino underdevelopment. Lack of direct comment can be explained in terms of political prudence, or simply because the author shared a common form of ideology that evaluates the native world very negatively. In any case, racial determinism remains the only explanation that these writers use to explain Filipino artistic 'underdevelopment'.

But Creus was aware that some Filipino artists, most of them painters, had overcome the barriers that hindered their creativity, those who, 'crossing the seas on the wings of ingenuity, receive the revitalizing breezes of our civilization and the luminous beams of our artistic culture'. However, those Filipinos working in Madrid, Rome or Paris were no longer Filipino painters; that is, they created not a native or Filipino art, but a westernizing one:

In spite of the fact that these works of art were created by Filipinos, we cannot apply the term Filipino painting to their pictures exhibited at the Philippine Exposition of Madrid nor to pictures that are on show at the moment at the Universal Exposition of Barcelona, nor to pictures we can see in our Museum [in Vilanova i la Geltrú], in spite of

the fact that most of these oil paintings represent Philippine usage and customs or beautiful Philippine landscapes.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, Creus adopted a contradictory attitude to Filipino works of art and to Filipino nature. Although he considered that racial limitations determined the inferiority of the islanders as compared with Europeans, he also thought that an intensive process of assimilation could lead some native artists to 'salvation', as the examples of Luna and Hidalgo show. These approaches do not admit of cultural diversity. If Filipinos wish to be integrated into a modern and western society, they must give up their Filipino nature.

What did the Filipino élite think of the exhibition? Most *ilustrados* were bitterly opposed to the Philippine Exposition of 1887, above all to the exhibition of 'wild' Filipino people. They considered, correctly, that the exhibition of Filipino natives would be manipulated by the Spanish authorities, and particularly by the Spanish friars, with the intention of showing a primitive Filipino society, a society that was incapable of self-government, forever needing Spanish colonial guidance and, above all, control by the friars.

But for the *ilustrados* it was more difficult to talk about the Filipino art exhibited in Madrid than about the Philippine Exhibition as a whole. They were aware of the limitations of Filipino painting and sculpture according to western rules, though this could be explained by the repression imposed by the friars, the same repression that Filipinos suffered in the scientific world, and in their life styles. At the same time, these *ilustrados* were proud of the worth and artistic success of the two most renowned artists of Philippine history: Luna and Hidalgo. It could not be easy for *ilustrados* to evaluate dispassionately the Filipino art they had seen in Madrid: it was necessary to admit some limitations. Graciano López Jaena (1856–96), the most astute writer and speaker of all the *ilustrados* living in Madrid at that time, gave his personal opinion on the Filipino art in an article not devoted specifically to the Philippine Exposition of Madrid, but to the Filipino presence in the Universal Exposition of Barcelona of 1888.<sup>16</sup> However, the arguments he used and the observations he made upon that exposition can also be applied to the 1887 exposition, since almost all the objects shown in Barcelona had been shown in Madrid the year before.

After a passionate description of Philippine geography and history, and after criticizing the neglect suffered by the archipelago until the time of the Hispanic-German conflict over the Carolinas, Jaena mercilessly attacked the Barcelona Exposition. His review referred to the whole exposition, most specifically to its ideological structure. In fact, the ideological context of the Madrid Exposition was the same as that of the Barcelona Exposition; but the Philippine collections were shown in a much more splendid way in Madrid than they were in Barcelona. Jaena's attack is directed, as one might expect, against the participation of Spanish friars in the exhibition design. Jaena considered that the friars tried to show the most negative part of Philippine society, their objective being to demonstrate the Filipino 'infantile condition', and hence the indispensable and eternal religious control that they, the Filipino people, must accept if they were to reach – in a distant future which might never arrive – 'civilization'. But Jaena did not forget the responsibility of the civil authorities:

The ruling classes have made an effort to show Philippine backwardness, they have confused public opinion with their own political interest; they have not shown the advances that the Philippines have made in the last twenty years . . . thanks to foreign capital and . . . to the energy of some Philippine natives who, raising their humiliated heads, have faced with tenacity the ire of theocratic absolutism, to the anger of the religious orders which until now are the oppression of those peoples, the fierce repressor of their freedom.

According to Jaena, there were only a few interesting collections, exhibited by private individuals, the Spanish Overseas Ministry and the Jesuits. There were botanical, zoological and mineral collections, some models of housing, some photographs of Philippine skulls and some ethnographic objects. All had been shown previously in Madrid in 1887.

But of all the works of art exhibited in Barcelona, Jaena emphasized 'the immortal genius of Luna', who showed his most recent painting *España conduciendo a Filipinas por el camino del progreso* (o *hacia la gloria*) (Spain guiding the Philippines along the road of progress – or to glory).<sup>17</sup> According to Jaena, 'although the picture was painted deftly, the hand of genius can be seen in it; its brilliant colour shows to wonderful effect and gives a surprising perspective'. Indeed, Luna's painting showed Filipino artistic

ability, but Jaena had something more to say upon this question. He used the subject matter of this picture to make a new and biting criticism of the friars. He comments that an 'important detail is lacking in this oil painting: a friar blindfolding the eyes of the Filipino Indian so that she cannot see the path of the glory whither Spain leads her'. These words made a deep impression; when he spoke at the *Ateneo de Barcelona*, the audience exploded into 'loud laughter, noisy and long applause', according to a transcript of the speech. At this point, Jaena's speech turned into a diatribe against the friars, in which he reinterpreted some Filipino sculptures exhibited at Madrid and Barcelona. Jaena may well have been capable of extracting the true meaning of these woodcarvings, which would have been obscure to most of the audience, confused by the supposed simplicity and by the colonial submission that they apparently show. Jaena noted with marked irony that the sculptors 'all share the same idea; they have carved some sculptures which, even though they are imperfect, very clearly show the Filipino moral condition'. All the sculptures reveal 'the lamentable current state of the Philippines'. Jaena described the bust of Manila Archbishop, Fr Pedro Payo, carved by Ciriaco Gaudínez, 'as a symbol of intransigence and obstacles to progress'. Another woodcarving, entitled *El país del Juepe* (Juepe country) 'shows a dishevelled woman who holds a pitch torch made of coco-palm leaves, signifying that fanaticism, ignorance and the *status quo* reign in the Philippines, because some people want it'. Jaena's interpretation was totally opposed to the original intention of the work.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the Filipino writer made an interesting, incisive psychoanalytical interpretation, which can be judged as completely 'revisionist'.

Jaena used other woodcarvings mentioned in previous paragraphs as justification for 'talking about the moral, social and political nature of the Filipino people'. Jaena's words are really very impressive:

Gentlemen: imagine Spain, that old-fashioned Spain with its inquisitions and prudishness, with its witchcrafts and other goblins, with its flags and cauldrons, with its gallows and knives; imagine Spain enclosed in the castle of a feudal lord, in the citadels of marquises, earls and barons; imagine Spain subjugated under the authority of a prince or under the iron will of an absolute king; if you have imagined all of this, you can see in it the portrait of the Philippine Islands, you have only to replace the grey-haired bearded lords, of sword and shield, with the habit

and tonsure of the friar, and the gallows and knife with boughs and bindweeds, and you will finally see the gloomy picture of the Archipelago.

The public was surprised by this strong attack by the speaker. Therefore, Jaena was quick to claim he was not on a 'revolutionary platform'. He tried to clarify his words, saying that 'talking about the Philippines and not mentioning the friars is like describing contemporary Spain while forgetting its Frascuelos and Lagartijos,<sup>19</sup> the bull and the bullfighters'. But Jaena was not satisfied with this attractive comparison between the Philippines and Spain; he crossed the limits of what we might consider a simple folklorist reflection showing what this situation involved for the Filipino people:

. . . just as these [the bullfight followers] define the nature of the Spanish people, so the friars are the cause of the constitutional anaemia of Philippine provinces; they are the parasites which absorb the organic, social, moral and political life of the Malay peoples. Friars are the omnipotent factor of nothing, of Philippine Island backwardness and misfortune. In their hands are the levers of knowledge, of science and moral; but they fanaticize instead of teaching, they idiotize instead of instructing and they finally ruin education.

Furthermore, Jaena categorically rejected the usual conservative opinions on the 'laziness of Filipinos', and he denied that the Filipino people were opposed to progress and civilization. He finally used a very good example of Philippine capacity for work, that of the Philippine immigrants who were employed as sailors around the world and who could be seen working in the city of Barcelona: 'Barceloneta<sup>20</sup> is, gentlemen, a brilliant contradiction of supposed Philippine laziness', finishing his speech by appealing to Catalan employers to contribute to Philippine economic development.

Jaena was able to contradict the opinions of friars, conservatives and even most Spanish liberals on the backwardness of the Filipino natives. The Filipino writer understood his compatriots' limitations, their not very advanced techniques and their rudimentary expression of form, but he turns the argument on its head and takes these points, citing their works of art, however simple or prudish, as samples or unconscious reflexes of the repressed social conditions in which Filipinos lived and in which they could see their incipient artistic abilities and capacities wasting away.

## Appendix

### Location of some of the works of art mentioned

Many of the oil paintings and woodcarvings exhibited in Madrid in 1887 are still in the capital, since they became part of the foundation collection of the Museo-Biblioteca de Ultramar (Overseas Museum and Library) opened in 1888. When this was closed in 1908, the Filipino works of art were moved, together with other Philippine works of art, to the Museo de Arte Moderno (Modern Art Museum, MAM). All are registered in the MAM general inventory in the Museo del Prado archives (cat. no. L-071). Twenty-four oil paintings exhibited in 1887 passed into the MAM; works by Juan Luna, Félix R. Hidalgo, Julián Aristegui, Granada Cabezudo, F. Flores y Ri, Pilar Lantoc, Félix Martínez Lumbreras, B. Morales, R. Riego de Ríos, Francisco Ruibamba, Agustín Sáez, Telesforo Sucgang and Miguel Zaragoza. Today, all the pictures belong to

the Museo del Prado, though none of them is displayed in that museum, since they are on loan to other museums and Spanish institutions. Most of the Filipino pictures exhibited at the 1887 Philippine Exposition are on loan to Las Palmas de Gran Canaria city council. Most of the woodcarvings went to the Museo-Biblioteca de Ultramar, and later to the MAM. This museum became first the Museo Español de Arte Contemporáneo (Spanish Museum of Contemporary Art), and later the current Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Queen Sofía National Museum Art Centre). The Filipino woodcarvings belong to the latter institution, but are on loan to the Museo Nacional de Antropología (National Museum of Anthropology) Madrid, where some are exhibited at its Alfonso XII street headquarters. Twenty woodcarvings from the 1887

Philippine Exposition are in Madrid, including works by Braulio Baltasar, José Flameño, Manuel Flores, Vicente Francisco, Ciriaco Gaudínez, Crispulo Jocson, Rosendo Martínez, Aniceto Mercado,

Doroteo Reyes, Domingo Teotico, Serapio Tolentino, Mariano Napil and Licerio Villarreal. Like the paintings, the woodcarvings are registered in the MAM general inventory.

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### Notes and references

- 1 This painting was acquired by the *Diputación Provincial* of Barcelona. Franco donated it to the Philippine government in the 1950s.
- 2 The exposition guide gives this work the title *Una mestiza*; other sources refer to it as *La mestiza en su tocador* (The mestiza at her dressing table). This painting was donated by the artist to the Biblioteca Museo Víctor Balaguer, of Vilanova i la Geltrú – province of Barcelona – where it is currently exhibited. Apparently, Charing was the nickname of Rosario Melgar, Luna's sister-in-law.
- 3 In the National Fine Arts Exposition of 1884, where Luna presented his *Spoliarium*, Hidalgo exhibited the oil painting entitled *Jóvenes cristianas expuestas al populacho* (*Young Christian girls displayed to the common herd*). This work was awarded a second-class medal and brought great celebrity to its author. Unfortunately, it was destroyed by fire in 1939.
- 4 A. García Llansó, *El Museo-Biblioteca de Ultramar* (Barcelona, 1897), p. 73. The words of Llansó suggest that the Museum had not acquired any works by Luna and Hidalgo. However, the general inventory of the Museo de Arte Moderno (Museo del Prado Archives, sign. L-071) notes the receipt, after the closure of the Biblioteca-Museo de Ultramar in 1908, of three paintings by Luna and six by Hidalgo. Why García Llansó does not mention them is unknown.
- 5 A. Vicenti, 'Pintura, escultura y arqueología', in *Exposición de Filipinas. Colección de artículos publicados en El Globo, diario ilustrado político, científico y literario* (Madrid, 1887), p. 146.
- 6 A. Flórez and R. Piquer, *Crónica de la Exposición de Filipinas. Estudio crítico-descriptivo* (Madrid, 1887), p. 77.
- 7 Flórez and Riquer, op. cit. (note 6), p. 78.
- 8 It was published in *La política de España en Filipinas*, on 25 September 1894.
- 9 Vicenti, op. cit. (note 5), p. 146.
- 10 In this phrase, the word *imaginero* – literally 'sculptor of religious images' – is taken in a pejorative sense; the writer uses it to identify popular engravers whom he considers craftsmen, not artists.
- 11 García Llansó, op. cit. (note 4), p. 73.
- 12 M. Creus Esther, 'El arte Filipino. III y último', *Boletín de la Biblioteca-Museo Balaguer* 46 (1888), pp. 1–3.
- 13 *Anitos* (*a-ni-to*) are carvings of small size that represent the spirits of ancestors; they are very common among the non-Christian populations of Northern Luzon. Nevertheless, some of the carvings thought to be *anitos* are in fact *bulul* (or *bul-ul*), deities or spirit custodians of rice granaries or crops.
- 14 Creus Esther, op. cit. (note 12), p. 1.
- 15 Creus Esther, op. cit. (note 12), pp. 1–2.
- 16 G. López Jaena, *Discursos y artículos varios. Notas y comentarios por el prof. Jaime C. de Veyra* (Manila, 1951), pp. 3–17. The original text was read by Jaena in the Ateneo of Barcelona, on 25 February 1889 and it was published in *La Solidaridad*, on 28 February of the same year.
- 17 It was painted and signed in Paris, in 1888, by order of the Overseas Ministry. It is an enormous painting: 442 cm high and 167 cm broad. The work represents two young women from behind who ascend by steps towards progress or glory. The guide is a Spanish woman, while the other is a Philippine girl.
- 18 *Juepe* is a word that is used in the Philippines for a pitch torch; but *El país del Juepe* was not really the title of the sculpture. The image that Jaena describes was part of a group of two figures already mentioned, carved by Manuel Flores and entitled *¿Quién vive? ¡España!* (*Who is it? Spain!*), which was previously exhibited in the exposition of 1887.
- 19 *Frascuero* and *Lagartijo* were the nicknames of two very famous Spanish bullfighters of the second half of the nineteenth century, who competed fiercely inside and outside the bullring. Jaena's reference to bullfighting, the Spanish *fiesta nacional*, and the comparison with the friars of the Philippines must be understood in a very negative sense, since bullfighting was for *ilustrados* not only a burden on Spain, but a disgrace and a real anachronism in the supposedly civilized Spanish society of the end of the nineteenth century.
- 20 *Barceloneta* is, and more especially was, a working-class and fishing neighbourhood of Barcelona.