

## BD forum

## Bright prospects foreseen for art galleries, artists

With Filipinos' increasing awareness of the value of art works, the activities of art galleries, and the better standards being set up for the sector, the industry has bright prospects for the future.

This was the assessment made by industry representatives during a recent *Business Day* forum on art galleries. However, they added that the industry still needs a lot of support from the government, for instance in some form of endowment for the art galleries.

With regards to the government's cultural development policies, the forum participants agreed that there should be an official body to ensure that these policies are followed and that the duplication of functions among the different government cultural agencies are avoided.

The other topics during the forum discussed were: the commercialization of art, the accreditation system for art galleries and dealers, and art as an investment.

Attendees were: Allan Cosio, president of the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP); Barbara Mae Dacanay from Philippine Art News; Didi Dee, owner of Hiraya Gallery; Joey Montilla, assistant curator of Loma's Garage; Jing Pagulayan, manager of the Greenhills Art Center; Eva Toledo, curator of Sining Kamali; and Bobi Valenzuela, curator of Hiraya Gallery.

Excerpts from the forum follow:

**BUSINESS DAY:** *One very sensitive issue in the art scene these days is the so called commercialization of art. How far can art be commercialized, and why is it commercialized?*

**VALENZUELA:** When you put up a gallery, you put up paintings for sale. That act alone is already commercial. I think it is in the manner of how you sell your art works that will distinguish between the commercial art and just plain commercial.

University-trained artists, I believe that they are a recent phenomena. The Luz Gallery and Solidaridad were the first serious art galleries. But art galleries have been in Manila for so long.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Was there a recent increase in the number of art galleries?*

**VALENZUELA:** I would say so. As Mr. Pagulayan said, more people are now aware of the value of paintings.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *It was said that*

*BUSINESS DAY: Do certain galleries cater to a certain income bracket?*

**COSIO:** Yes.

**VALENZUELA:** For Hiraya, we cannot make any classification yet. No very rich people have patronized us. Likewise, *wala pa talagang* true collectors who have patronized us. We have varied clients. They come to the gallery and when they see a good work they buy.

**DEE:** I don't think we have any specific income bracket in mind. What we're concerned about is putting up good shows. Sometimes, however, the price range of the artist is very high. Naturally, we'll then be getting the higher income bracket.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Galleries maintain a certain selling attraction so as to be different from others. Do you think about these attractions beforehand? Do you study the market?*

**VALENZUELA:** Actually, we do not think of marketing. We just want to put up good shows.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *How do you choose the paintings that you display in your galleries?*

**VALENZUELA:** We must believe in what the artists are doing. Whether they will sell or not hardly enters our minds.

**PAGULAYAN:** In Greenhills, the

to our gallery and sell their works. But these are all subject to the curator's decision.

**PAGULAYAN:** There are also commissioned pieces. These are paintings we do not buy but which the artists want to be exhibited. If these pieces are sold, the gallery gets 30% of the sale. In Greenhills, we mostly do outright buying.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *If the paintings are bought outside, is the mark-up 40% or 50%?*

**PAGULAYAN:** *Depende rin.* This is because, in art, it's very hard to qualify value. There are no definite rules.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Are you ever caught in a situation where there is a short supply of art works? Is production steady enough?*

**COSIO:** One point I would like to stress is that a painting as an art work is different from a painting that is a merchandise for sale. My main interest is really the relationship between artists and art galleries. I brought with me a documented report from a national convention of artists which was held early last year at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC). One of the topics which we covered was art and the galleries. The report contains an assessment by the panel on art and the galleries

the guild of galleries or its equivalent to make all accredited art galleries members; and 7) to act as conciliator or arbiter of relationships and problems among artists, art galleries, and collectors.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Have the recommendations been adopted?*

**COSIO:** No, because to begin with, there has to be this move to revive the guild of galleries or its equivalent, or maybe form a new one so that they can together, perhaps, adopt a standard or agree on how to look at existing problems. It cannot start from the artists. It has to start from the galleries because we're talking now about the business of art.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Under the present arrangement, are the artists shortchanged?*

**COSIO:** No, we cannot be general about it. Maybe in some cases yes. But I think that there is really a great need for the galleries to get together like they did before. Then perhaps we can look forward to a better system. There should be a guild of galleries where they can put their heads together, set a system and maybe initiate programs on how to maintain a more regular art market and attract more artists to deal more with the galleries rather than going on their own and selling directly to clients. This is for

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Why do some people say that art is so commercialized now?*

**PAGULAYAN:** Maybe they say this because, right now, more people are becoming aware of art. Also, so many people are now buying paintings. I think these are the reasons.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *From the dealers' point of view, how profitable is art as a business?*

**PAGULAYAN:** I think it is profitable.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Is Greenhills Art Center a new gallery?*

**PAGULAYAN:** Yes, we only started last July.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Do you specialize in certain kinds of paintings?*

**PAGULAYAN:** I believe that Greenhills Art Center is the very first corporate gallery in Manila and in the Philippines.

**DEE:** What do you mean by a corporate gallery?

**PAGULAYAN:** We have so many incorporators.

**DEE:** Hiraya Gallery is also a corporation. The only distinguishing factor is that it is more within the family.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Are art galleries a recent phenomena or have they been around a long time?*

**VALENZUELA:** If you will consider the Mabini galleries, they have been around for a long time. But for the galleries that cater to the

when buildings started to rise, the walls had to be filled with paintings. There was a buying spree. Was this the cause of the awareness of the value of paintings?

**VALENZUELA:** I would say so. But according to some people, when Mrs. (Imelda) Marcos started buying paintings and then prodded the Blue Ladies to buy, that started it all.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Would you say that the market has been growing?*

**VALENZUELA:** It has grown because of the awareness.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Do you have an existing classification of galleries?*

**VALENZUELA:** *Are there galleries which cater only to a certain kind of market, or which sell only certain types of paintings?*

**COSIO:** Yes, there are galleries which cater only to certain types of artists. *Kanya-kanya.* I believe it is like this everywhere. The gallery owners decide on what kind of paintings they will market or what group of artists they will handle. Greenhills Art Center, for instance, has been dealing with artists who do the presentational kind of painting — still life, etc. Luz Gallery, on the other hand, concentrates more on abstract art.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Is there any specific trend?*

**COSIO:** No. It depends on what you're talking about at the moment and whom you're talking to. That's the way I look at it.

only attraction we have is a coffee shop which is open to everyone. In one portion of the gallery, there is a book shop where you can buy books on art.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *What is the usual price range of paintings that you have in your respective galleries?*

**PAGULAYAN:** When we put up the Greenhills Art Center, our main objective was to pick up the new artists and help them in their career. So we try to buy their pieces. Now, for the artists who have already established a name for themselves, the prices of their works are, of course, different.

**MONTILLA:** I'd like to go back to the question on what makes one gallery different from another. What is fascinating about our gallery is my mother. People would go there and she would just talk to them about almost anything concerning the history of Philippine heritage and the arts. Also, our gallery caters to the collections of young artists. The gallery is not really as lucrative as the Greenhills Art Center. It's just a house. It actually started as a garage. We didn't have any car, so we converted our garage into a gallery.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *How do you look for artists and for paintings? Can an artist just approach you and sell his works?*

**MONTILLA:** We have what we call outside buying. Some artists come

which was composed of several art gallery owners and a number of artists. They made an assessment of the relationship between the artists and the galleries, after which we were able to pinpoint the problems existing. Some recommendations were then made on how to solve these problems. Some recommendations came from the panel and from the convention's delegation.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *What were some of the recommendations?*

**COSIO:** After having pinpointed the problems and having declared the assessment on how the relationship of the artists and the galleries were at that time, certain recommendations were reached: 1) to adopt a standard consignment form or agreement between artists and galleries. The latter should review their existing consignment terms with the view to encouraging artists to consign their works; 2) to look for possible agents with insurance companies for a standard insurance policy coverage against art losses and damage; 3) to establish and maintain a service arm with adequate facilities for authentication of art works; 4) to establish a code of ethics for art galleries and artists; 5) to establish and maintain a simple but effective system for accreditation of those involved in the business of art. Such a service arm shall guide and assist duly accredited art galleries in maintaining a reputable standing; 6) to require

the good of the market, the protection of the collectors, art buyers, artists, and the art galleries as well. There would be some sort of a mutual development.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *What were the reactions of the galleries getting organized?*

**COSIO:** They were already organized before.

**VALENZUELA:** What caused it to die a natural death?

**COSIO:** I think it was just a lack of leadership. Also, maybe it was a lack of interest at that time.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *What do you mean by accredited art galleries?*

**COSIO:** Well, if you have an association and you agree that there will be accredited members, there is some sort of prestige there.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Does that imply any standards?*

**COSIO:** That means you're following a certain standard set by the guild.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Is there any government agency supervising the selling of art pieces?*

**COSIO:** In a way, yes because they're all licensed to sell.

**BUSINESS DAY:** *Are all the art works authenticated?*

**PAGULAYAN:** Authentication is only being done for old pieces.

**COSIO:** Yes. If the artist is around, he authenticates his piece. The problem of authentication arises

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