



THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS SINCE 1900

# MANILA BULLETIN

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# 100 Katao, Taka

By JASER A. MARASIGAN

**P**AETE, 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-Serungard, 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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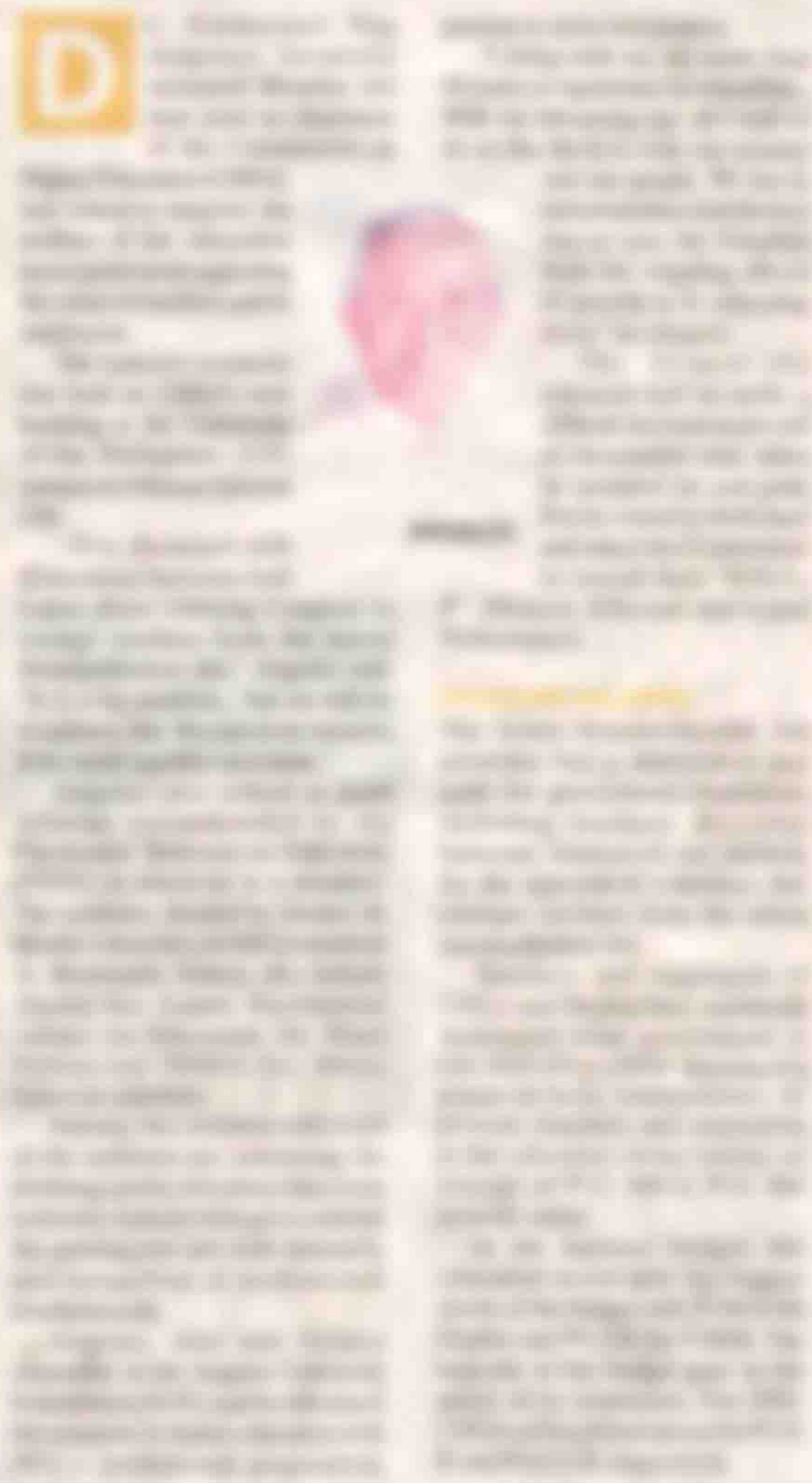


**NATIONAL ARTIST Abdulmari Asia Imao expresses the Muslim heritage in his taka artwork.**

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...  
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**'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.

