

## JUAN LUNA - PAINTER AND PATRIOT

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HAVE you ever seen the paintings called the Blood Compact and Miguel Lopez de Legaspi, which which now hang in historic Malacanang Palace? These are two of Juan Luna's best known works. The former canvas, painted in Paris, represents the pact of peace, friendship, and understanding made in 1565 between the Spanish explorer Miguel Lopez de Legaspi and Capitan Martin de Goiti with a native chieftain, Sikatuna of Bohol. These men sealed their agreement by drinking wine mixed with a few drops of their own blood.

But it is the Spoliarium, Luna's masterpiece, that principally brought world fame to this Filipino painter. The original is in Barcelona, but a copy which used to hang in the Marble Hall of the defunct Ayuntamiento, is now in the National Art Museum on Herran Street. It depicts in its stark reality, a gory scene in the Roman era - the end of gladiatorial combat, an ancient Roman sport designed to amuse the emperors and the nobles. The scene is the Spoliarium, a room behind the Coliseum, a vast amphitheater capable of accommodating one hundred thousand spectators where the combats were held. One of the fights has just ended, and the bloody bodies of the dead are being dragged into the Spoliarium by attendants. According to Graciano Lopez-Jaena, "to see the Spoliarium is to be transported, as if by magic, to the pagan age to witness a horrible spectacle full of terror and conflicting emotions."

It was Rizal, who saw the sublime in this painting. "What strikes the observer," he said, "is not the bold lines or the brilliant coloring,



but its message - which is not mute. One can hear the tumult of the throng, the cry of the slaves, the metallic rattle of the armor on the corpses, the sobs of the orphans, murmur of prayers, with as much force and vividness as the crash of thunder amidst the roar of the cataracts, or the fairful and ominous rumble of the earthquake."

Juan Luna is credited with having produced almost one thousand paintings, about one tenth of which are first class canvases, and half a dozen prize winners. It would be impossible to enumerate all his works, so prolific was his brush. His creative genius was versatile, and he drew his subjects from history, religion, romance, literature, mythology, nature and the contemporary scene. His first masterpiece (The Death of Cleopatra (Rome 1881) was awarded a medal of the second class and a cash prize of one thousand duros (equivalent to (1,000) in view of "the courage of his strokes and the energy and propriety of his colorings". The honor he received from this and from the Spoliarium established his fame as a painter. He produced also a great number of portraits of brilliant colors. Of the light paintings, the most notable ones are: Jesters, and those pictures depicting street scenes in rural Madrid and small cafes in Paris - the life he knew only too well. Clotet, a French contemporary, recalled that Luna's pictures adorned the elegant halls of aristocratic and distinguished families in Spain and France. Some were given away as gifts and the others well paid for. Whether the expositions were held in Madrid or Barcelona, Paris, or St. Louis, U.S. Luna's canvases elicited the praise of art lovers and won medals for him. These honors he shared with his country and people.

Juan Luna was one of the few Filipinos who used local subjects and scenes thus revealing his spirit of nationalism. Those that reflect a strong nationalistic motif are: The Blood Compact, Miguel Lopez de Legaspi, España y Filipinas (an allegory), a sketch of the Death of Magellan or the Victory of Lapulapu (as he called it in his lighter mood), the Defeat of Spain (this he dedicated to Rizal), and an oil painting of Dr. Rizal. Well-known to all high school students of today are the sketches illustrating Rizal's immortal novels Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo.