

JUAN LUNA AND THE "SPOLIARIUM"

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During the early part of 1883 in Rome, an ambitious Ilokano student, fired by the enthusiasm to make a name for himself and his country, met his dream which was later to place the small obscure town of Badoc, Ilocos Norte, and the Philippines on the international map of greatness. For at the time the idea of the much celebrated "Spoliarium" was conceived - Juan Luna came across a book by Dezobry and found in its pages these somber and ghastly passages: "Traversing the ample galleries surrounding the circus and descending the magnificent stone staircase, I heard something like a suppressed moan and, as I was listening, someone passing by my side said to me: Those are echoes from the Spoliarium. I advanced, descending toward the place where the strong noise came from under the lowest vaults of the amphitheatre, and arrived within a vast room, poorly lighted and illuminated only in part by smoking torches. There I saw a horrible spectacle: a lugubrious procession of dead and dying gladiators, dragged in by means of hooks in the hands of circus attendants who were passing, blaspheming. On a small stairway opposite from where I was, a crowd of curious persons had gathered; there were the Roman women, the dissolute youth, and all the fregs of barbarous people mingled with others who seemed to belong to the sect of Nazareness. Little by little, my eyes became accustomed to the gloom and I perceived a young woman piously seated among the bodies of men, and wild beasts sprawling in sticky blood."

Immediately after reading the novel, the young Ilokano artist began to translate the gory scene on canvas. He labored in his gallery for eight months. Finally, in May 1884, the painting was finished and was exhibited at the National Exposition in Rome.