

A Preliminary Study of Ceiling Murals from Five Southeastern Cebu Churches

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Abstract

This is a preliminary study on the iconography, spatial distribution, and stylistic pattern of church ceiling painting based on case studies of five colonial-era Southeastern Cebu churches, done during the early decades of the 20th century. Each display comprehensive ceiling decoration programs executed by various Cebu-based painters, three of whom have dominated the available literature: Canuto Avila (Carcar and Dalaguete), Raymundo Francia (Sibonga and Argao), and Miguel Villareal (Boljoon). Utilizing concepts in iconography and visual culture, these ceiling paintings are analyzed and evaluated based on an understanding of Catholic catechism and the role that the church's interiors played in the teachings of Church doctrine. There is also a need to explicate a preliminary realization of the conditions and contexts of artistic production and reception of these paintings, a process that was determined by each parish's capacity to imagine, fund, and execute these elaborate visual decoration schemes. The paintings are integrated into a complex system of parochial art patronage, in which empowered parishioners, ambitious parish priests, and a visually literate public interact and intersect their common ideological and political aesthetic interests to fulfill a commonly felt, but differently interpreted project: to ennoble the town's chief religious space with their expression of faith and secular power, as well as their indexical assertion of social and economic ascendancy during the American Colonial Period.

Key words: southeastern Cebu, church ceiling murals, political economy, modernity, patron-client relations

Preliminaries to the Field: A Short Review of Relevant Literature

DOCUMENTING THE PATTERNS of political and economic exchange of rural lowland towns has been an established field in Philippine Studies, particularly through the lens of religion and its articulation through cultural production and art patronage. Foremost among these is Reynaldo Ileto's *Pasyon and Revolution* (1979), which captures the idea of a "history from below" by a re-reading of millenarian and popular political movements in southern and central Luzon from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries as (to paraphrase Benedict Anderson) "imagined communities;" Ileto's work also shows that this "history from below" is foregrounded through the hermeneutic of the hybridized folk Catholic text of the *pasyon*. This cultural history is rooted in the ability to intuit the "folk Catholic imagination" that Timoteo Gener has teased out from his critique of David Tracey's analysis of "popular religiosity and inculturation in lowland Philippines" (Gener 2005, 25). Smita Lahiri, in her analysis of the interaction between empowered actors of spiritist communities in southern Luzon like the Ciudad Mystica de Dios, and the national political elites based in Manila, also foregrounds this discourse as integral to the fabric of Philippine Studies. More potently, Lahiri redirects the critical gaze back towards the propagators of this discourse of re-identifying with the native as an essentialized icon of national cultural politics. She unveils the authors of such nativist nationalist projects like Pilipinohiya led by Zeus Salazar, Virgilio Almario, and Prospero Covar who were chiefly responsible for its dominance in contemporary studies of Filipino folk culture (Lahiri in Willford and George 2005, 34–35).

This focus and critical attention has led some scholars like Fenella Cannel to question the validity of Filipino Christian lowland culture as a legitimate object of scholarly attention (Cannel 1998, 241–245). This recent disavowal is rooted in the gender-biased perspective that is seen to inflict both nativist nationalist scholarship and Western faith-based analysis with an orthodox patriarchy that ignores questions of subjectivity,

femininity, and other hitherto marginalized social categories like queer identity in mapping the topography—as well as invoking the possibilities—of the Filipino folk mind and body.

This paper wishes to contribute to a more “constructionist” framework in analyzing and interrelating Filipino folk culture, as well as the political economy of both colonialism and modernity under whose collective rubric the study of the “folk” has been bracketed. Such an approach necessitates opening up the textual nature of culture based on Eric Hobsbawm’s idea of “invented traditions,” wherein such is “taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overt or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983, 1). These invented traditions construe the “necessity” of culture as an intersection of political, social, and economic interests that are configured by distinct social classes and hierarchies of a community, particularly a nation state. Such configurations are therefore subject to analysis based on the manner by which certain traditions are emphasized over others, and the need to anchor this tradition upon a preordained and preferably primordial past so as to erase questions of authenticity and legitimacy.

It is in this approach to studying culture that the paper also unveils the need for understanding the effects of artistic production not merely as a corollary or “mirror” that reflects larger economic and political forces, but also as a generative determinant of such forces in the first place. This is explored through the idea of political aesthetics which was teased by, among others, Emilie Gomart and Walter Benjamin, who spoke of the “aestheticization of politics” in which art simply does not follow political processes, but themselves manipulate the spaces of political possibility through its deployment within the sphere of contesting publics. This implies that the political forces that configure the Filipino folk worldview and its “performativity” (to paraphrase Judith Butler) can be measured through the kinds of imagery, rituals, and spaces that seek to invoke certain

ideologies, or for that matter, configure others to contest dominating ideologies. This now requires us to reconsider the modality of folk Filipino Catholicism not merely through the parameters of Church-sanctioned and imperialist-administered dogma, and its antithesis through folk-derived spiritism and anticolonial resistance. Rather, we should look at folk Filipino Catholicism as a hybridized space within which both hegemonic colonialism and native resistance cohabit and fuse into a dialectic of redemption through an assertion of local difference, one that is often construed by more secular analysts as “nationalist.”

Focusing on the nature of this cultural local-ness by situating the study at the “margins” of the national center, in this case, five towns on the southeastern coast of Cebu island, the paper also reiterates connections to the study of modernity. This is done through the mechanisms of social and economic progress, anchored via distinct modalities of political organization (such as *rentier* politics, agro-industrial mercantilism, and *mestizo* landlord capitalism) and rooted in colonialism and incipient nationalism, that manifests as tangible and exchangeable values within the social topography of the rural seaside community. This is especially true when the intersection of such values is conflated with faith and social distinction, and realized through the distinct and unavoidably colonial structure of the Filipino church-plaza complex. Mary Cita Hufana, in her study of the church plaza complex at San Fernando, La Union, called for a new approach in relating the colonial economy with the social structure of the *pueblo* to arrive at concrete determinations that lead to the production of certain forms of church art, from the stone fabric to the internal décor. This paper takes off from this premise by combining political economy and political aesthetics, both of which are necessary interstices in relocating the effect of local culture and the economy of the colonial *pueblo* in the hegemonic “possibility space,” what Foucault would call “heterotopia,” of the rural colonial-era church art.

Introduction: Five Towns, Five Churches

A tradition of elaborately programmed church art often characterizes the Catholic parishes of the Central Visayas during the late 18th to the early 20th century. Corresponding to the late Spanish colonial era to the end of American colonial up to Japanese Occupation, this period also coincided with the emergence of Central Visayas, particularly Cebu and Bohol, from decades of economic stagnation, which was partly caused by pirate attacks of raiding Sulu or Iranun fleets, particularly between 1720 and 1786. The subsequent strengthening of Spanish coastal defenses, particularly under Fray Julian Bermejo, OSA, between 1802 and 1837, as well as the opening of the Port of Cebu to international trade starting in 1860, helped end this stagnation. The opening of trade allowed agricultural surpluses throughout the area¹ to be concentrated in trading entrepôts, resulting in a dramatic expansion of economic wealth by landowners, planters, traders, and shippers based not only in the city of Cebu, but also in outlying towns that controlled trade routes and served as trading hubs themselves to other towns and islands.

It is in this context that we view the significance of the five towns whose church ceilings are part of this survey. All five are located on the long, southeastern flank of Cebu island, and are currently connected together by the South Cebu National Highway that runs from Cebu City and circumnavigates the rest of the island through its narrow coastal plain. Carcar City (N 10° 06' E 123° 38'), the largest of these towns in terms of population (Philippine Census, 2010, 107, 323), is also the oldest of the five towns in the survey and the closest to Cebu City, at about 35.94 kilometers southwest of the city's historical heart in Santo Niño and Ermita. Founded as a *reducción* originally called Sialo in 1582, and subsequently centered on the modern-day *barangay* of Valladolid (Mojares 1985, 6–20), Carcar became the major settlement south of Cebu City in the 17th and early 18th centuries that claimed all subsequent towns further south as its *visitas*, most of whom would be constituted as separate *pueblos* from the 1760s to the 1840s. Sibonga (N 10° 02' E 123°34') lies 10.20 kilometers

southwest of Carcar City, and is a smaller, first-class municipality of 43,641 people (2010 Census). Argao (N 9° 53' E 123° 36'), another first-class municipality with a population of 69,503 (2010 Census) lies 15.5 kilometers further southwest from Sibonga. Dalaguete (N 9° 46' E 123° 32') is another first-class municipality 14.9 kilometers southwest of Argao, and has a population of 63,239 (2010 Census). Finally, Boljoon (N 9° 38' E 123° 29') is a fifth-class municipality that lies 16.06 kilometers southwest of Dalaguete, and has the smallest population at 15,027 (2010 Census). All five towns face the Bohol Strait to the east, and the Trans-Cebu Mountains to the west.

Before the National Highway was completed sometime in the 1930s, these towns were interconnected through seaports that served as trading and freight hubs not only between themselves and Cebu City but also with Bohol, Negros Oriental, Siquijor, and as far away as Iloilo, Capiz, Western and Southern Leyte, Surigao del Norte, Bukidnon, Misamis Occidental and Oriental, and Zamboanga del Norte. It was the brisk movement of trade goods and agricultural produce through these ports, and the economic wealth they generated, that formed the basis for expending large amounts of capital for secular and religious architecture, applied arts, and paintings, as well as the more ephemeral performing arts traditions, such as passion plays and secular theatre. In particular, Mojares (1985) and Ramas (2002) have both discussed the oral and theatrical traditions found in Carcar and Cebu City, such as the *linambay*, *balitaw*, *pamalaye*, *duplo*, and *kolisisi*, most of which were actively undertaken during the late 19th to the early mid-20th centuries—a period roughly contiguous to the decoration of church ceilings of the churches concerned.

It was the comparatively recent introduction of international cash crop trading in the latter half of the 19th century, resulting in a rapid monetization of the agricultural economies of these towns, that formed the economic logic for the development of art patronage along the southeastern coast. Coupled with movements of newly enriched Spanish and *mestizo* Chinese-Filipino merchant families from the old districts of Cebu City to the more airy expanses of these seaside towns (wherein they

built their second homes in their *pueblos*), the growth of the rural-based upper class through land ownership, harvesting, and trading assured a consistent base for religious and secular taxation. The new residents were also a source of surpluses that helped maintain native sea patrols securing the coastline, and rebuild or refurbish church complexes that were originally founded in the 17th and 18th centuries, but which were allowed to deteriorate because of pirate attacks. More importantly, the period between the 1850s and the 1920s also saw the active construction and embellishment of church structures and interiors using a variety of hybridized styles that became popular in the period, such as Revival Gothic, Revival Baroque, Neo-Rococo, Neo-Mudejar, Second Empire Eclecticism, and Neoclassicism.

These can be seen in the external fabric of the churches themselves. Saint Catherine of Alexandria at Carcar follows the basilica plan with two engaged belfries in its façade, utilizes elements of Neo-Mudejar mixed with Austrian Baroque and Neoclassicism dating from between 1858 and 1871. Situated on top of a hill that also contains the convent, city hall, and a public elementary school, the church offers a commanding view of the coastline of Carcar facing the Bohol Strait—most likely the result of pirate attacks in the 18th century that forced colonial planners to situate the *pueblo* and its church-plaza complex on higher, defensible ground, since the belfry also served as the watch and alarm tower.

Nuestra Señora del Pilar at Sibonga, also constructed using the basilica plan with two engaged belfries at the façade, mainly integrates Revival Gothic elements into the fabric of a Neo-Renaissance footprint in the manner of the Escorial School of Juan de Herrera. Built in stages from 1839 to 1907, Nuestra Señora del Pilar, like many churches in Cebu, was constructed on level ground facing the beach—an indication of the more recent vintage of this church, since no fortifications or defensive works are seen surrounding its plaza. The façade currently faces the National Highway—a consequence of American demands for efficient road transport routes that bisected many colonial-era plazas, and allowed automobiles and buses direct access to the front of the church.

San Miguel de Arcangel at Argao, on the other hand, dates from 1768, and its structure is based on the Escorial School style. It also has a Latin cross plan, a detached belfry connected to the façade by a ground floor room, and an attached convent building facing a vast walled plaza. The entire style is marked as an affiliation with the Basilica of Santo Niño de Cebu, both of which originated from the period when these churches were built and run by the Jesuits before their expulsion from the Philippines. The church is located facing the beach near a large sandbar (currently the location of several beach resorts) and a pier at the old eastern “core” of the town, far enough from the National Highway that marks the town’s western section, with its market district.

San Guillermo de Aquitania, built in stages from 1802 to 1860, also closely follows the plan of Saint Miguel at Argao, with the church complex facing a large walled plaza next to the beach and with the national highway located a few blocks to the west. The difference between San Guillermo de Aquitania and San Miguel Arcangel is that the former was built by the Augustinians, who replaced the Jesuits as the provincialate holders of these southeastern Cebu parishes in the 19th century. The defensive fortifications that deterred Moro attacks in Dalaguete could still be seen in the watchtower between the plaza and the beach, which contains a bronze cannon.

Lastly, Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio at Boljoon was rebuilt after a devastating Moro raid in 1782, most of whose stonework was completed by 1829, but whose interiors would not be considered finished until 1948. Boljoon also followed, in its own way, the format of Argao and Santo Niño de Cebu, with the exception of a more archaic belfry, and the existence of walled defenses and blockhouses that were built by the energetic Fray Julian de Bermejo (1777–1851) to counter pirate attacks. The church-plaza complex forms the expansive core of a compactly planned and easily defensible town protected on the north by a large seaward cliff, and winding hills to the south that formed a deepwater bay facing the church to the east, now grown over by centuries of coral reef formations. Like all the parish churches of southeastern Cebu, Boljoon

was protected on its west flank by the Trans-Cebu Mountains that form a towering spine around the center of the island, eventually descending into a sheer cliff at the southern point of the island in the town of Santander.

The Painted Ceilings

...A group of primitives who had almost no formal training in painting techniques at all...these people earned their bread and butter with brush and paint, and on their own, learned the techniques of the Renaissance and Classical period masters.

- Romola Savellon and Ma. Lilibeth Abaquita

Executed in a period between 1920 and 1957, the painted ceilings of the churches of Carcar, Sibonga, Argao, Dalaguete, and Boljoon testify to the imaginative adaptation of Cebuano painters to the dictates of Catholic iconography, the sometimes-erratic religious art patronage, and the rapid changes in stylistic preference that occurred throughout the early to mid-20th century era. These five church ceilings attest to only a fragment of the total output of three distinct groups of artists who operated out of Cebu. A far larger output can still be seen in at least nineteen churches in neighboring Bohol. Meanwhile, several colonial-era churches in metropolitan Cebu City, including Santo Niño, the Cebu Metropolitan Cathedral, and the churches of Mandaue, Oton, and Lapu-Lapu, have lost their painted ceilings because of changes in taste following the Vatican II reforms in the early 1960s. While very little is known about these artists, their names have nonetheless been preserved in the form of autographs in some church ceilings. A preliminary survey of their works through fieldwork done by Savellon and Abaquita (2004) has also managed to glean some insights into the circumstances behind their production.

These groups congregate around the names of three recognized “masters” who designed and executed these ceiling paintings: Canuto Avila, Raymundo Rubi Francia, and Mariano Villareal. Of the three, Francia

seemed to have been the most senior, and the most accomplished in terms of designing a visual program for church ceilings. Francia led a group that also included his children, like Edilberto Francia; on other occasions (such as his Bohol church commissions), the elder Francia often collaborated with Avila. It was Francia who executed the complete ceiling program at Sibonga, and part of Argao. Canuto Avila, on the other hand, is regarded as the founder of a line of painters that includes his children, Ricardo and Maria Salome (who were also his collaborators), most of whom accompanied him when he executed his ceiling commissions. Avila is credited with the ceiling program at Dalaguete, and supposedly at Carcar. The third is Mariano Villareal, who is a native of Boljoon, and who seemed to have either led a group in completing the Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio church ceiling—or executed the entire commission himself. However, there also seem to be instances in which other painters repainted certain church ceilings after the initial commissions, which were done between 1920 and 1935. In the case of Carcar, a recent assertion has been made that most of the ceiling originally done by Avila was painted over by a local painter named Vicente Poncardas (Galicano 2012) between 1957 and 1961. On the other hand, Savellon and Abaquita (2004) also documented that an unnamed Bohol-based artist, who took over from Francia midway through his commission, completed the major part of the ceiling at Argao.

These changes and the transformations of church ceiling painting practice beg the question: what were the dynamics in visualizing and producing ceiling paintings for these churches? At another level, the nature of art patronage in these towns may also help explain some of the instances in which a comprehensive program (such as that found in Sibonga) would be forsaken in exchange for a hybridized mix-up of motifs (like that of Argao). More ominously, it may also indicate the motivations by which ceiling painting was discontinued, covered over with newer designs (in the case of Carcar), or whitewashed altogether. The attempt to answer these questions would necessarily invoke an analysis of artistic relations of production between painters and clients; the notion of an “appropriate style” as a precondition for an acceptable

schema in church decoration; and the ideological or aesthetic parameters in establishing the iconography of ceiling design that reflects collective desires and interests, such as catechetical instruction, communal desires for symbolic capitalization, and affective inclusivity to a visualizing rhetoric of faith and/or nationhood.

Sibonga: Triumph of a Canonical Program

Of the five churches in the study, Nuestra Señora del Pilar at Sibonga contains the most complete version of a canonical mural program. Finished by Raymundo Francia and his assistants in 1924 (National Historical Commission 2010), the murals extend throughout the entire nave ceiling, which is of a barrel vault; the flat-mounted aisle ceilings; and the ceiling holding up the choir loft near the main entrance. All these ceilings are made from wood timbering, most likely dating from the completion of the church in 1907.² The paintings themselves are endangered by numerous small cavities in the nave where water seepage from the roof has penetrated to the paint layer. The joints of the timbers also show numerous water intrusions that are slowly dissolving the murals. Despite extensive water damage, the general presence of surface mold, and the smell of wood rot and bat droppings, the murals are in a remarkable state of visual preservation, showing the entire compositional program that was designed by Francia. This revolved around the theme of the Seven Sacraments, which occupies the main panels that straddle the length of the nave [See Illustration 1 on the next page].³

Each of these main panels is then paired by smaller panels featuring various saints and episodes of the life of Christ.⁴ All together, the twenty-one illustrated panels in the nave ceiling are framed by a complex *tromp l'oeil* coffered framing that is centered upon elaborate rose garlands and rose-decorated bosses with leaf motifs that border the apex of the frames.

The barrel vault section over the choir loft contains the scene of the triple crucifixion (Christ and the two thieves) at Golgotha. On the other, the hemispherical section that terminates at the apse above the main altar contains



ILLUSTRATION 1: View of the barrel vault over the nave of Nuestra Señora del Pilar, painted in sections featuring the Seven Sacraments by Raymundo Francia and his assistants, c. 1924. PHOTO BY: Joselito A. de Guzman (taken May 2011).

a remarkable visual representation of the Creation found in Genesis. Here, Francia maximized the curving shape of the apse barrel vault to narrate the Seven Days of Creation in a frame-by-frame separation that starts with the outermost hemispheric frame with Day One (the Separation of Light from Darkness) to the innermost hemisphere that terminates the apse with Day Seven (the Rest of the Lord). Done in a by-now recognizable format of the *komiks* narrative,⁵ Francia's Genesis scenery masterfully adopts modern visual devices of mass communication in reiterating the canonic purpose of church ceiling paintings as instructional devices.

By contrast, the section holding up the choir loft near the main entrance contains three panels that deal with the challenges of accepting Christianity. The central panel contains a dramatic retelling of the persecution of early Christians in Rome at the arena of the Coliseum, with a descriptive caption painted on the bottom frame in both English and Cebuano: "First Christians Defending Their Faith" (*Unang Cristianos nga Naglaban sa ilang Tinoho-an*). This is complemented by a side panel featuring Christ driving away the moneylenders, and which is also equipped with a descriptive caption, again in both English and Cebuano: "Christ Purging the Temple" (*Ang Ginoo Nagsilot sa Nanag-panahastamas sa Simbahan, Pagbaton Kamo ug Kahadlok sa Balay sa Dios*). As the captions of this panel indicate, the rather abbreviated titles in English are substantially translated and interpellated in Cebuano, leading to a clearer understanding of the scene as an instructional moment in the struggle between commerce and piety in the eyes of local viewers. The final panel is an allegorical double portrait of Saints Peter and Paul set in an imaginary (perhaps Roman) landscape, with their respective iconic instruments (the Bible and Sword for St. Paul, and the Keys and Rooster nestled in an upper window for St. Peter). This panel, which contains the dark band on the bottom of the frame where the captions would be hand-lettered, does not have any captions, leading us to suspect that this particular painting is unfinished.

The paintings at the Nuestra Señora del Pilar church at Sibonga attest to the high degree of planning and systematized use of visual catechism

that was required of Catholic churches at the dawn of mass communication. This visual catechism was an iconographic system that was gradually being supplanted by secular entertainment like cinema at the time that the paintings was being done. Moreover, the use of *komiks*-styled illustration techniques hints at the stylistic hybridity being implemented by the painters. They attempted to recreate a traditional church painting program without the benefit of formal academic training, while living at a time when published illustrations were at its infancy, albeit the most accessible means of visual expression and visual education. The degree of decorative programming of the entire church ceiling hints at the creative power of the artistic group headed by Raymundo Francia. The group planned a comprehensive scheme that followed the metropolitan practice of painted ceiling decorations introduced by Spanish friars, and which adopted a style brought by foreign artists like the Italian Cesare Alberoni and Giovanni Dibella. Alberoni and Dibella popularized the use of *tromp l'oeil* ceiling paintings in Manila at the last quarter of the 19th century.⁶ At the same time, however, the level of figurative finish of the paintings seems to be of a comparatively coarser and native bent, indicating a vicarious transfer of painterly training from the academy in Manila to the rural setting of southeastern Cebu, and lending support to the assertion by Savellon and Abaquita that these painters “had almost no formal training in painting techniques at all” (2004, 1).

However, we may also look at this figurative schema from the viewpoint of the native painter and viewer who, uneducated perhaps in the Western classical academe, consistently and successfully utilized this form of figural representation as a consequence of colonial tutelage; at the same time, one can gauge the degree of schematic acceptance that the viewers and patrons of these paintings had. Such schemas of religious art that were formerly labeled as “crude” or “charming” because of its “folk” (thus unlettered but innately learned) element can also be seen in Angono, Rizal, where extant icon paintings of Francia’s historical contemporary Juan Senson display similar characteristics (Saguinsin 2006). We should thus look into the phenomena of this “folk native” style of painting

decoration in churches not only as an extension of colonial church art patronage that sanctioned “illiterate” artists, but also as efforts of pious Filipinos who continued to be devoted to Roman Catholicism despite the church’s losses during the period of Americanization and secularization of social life. We should also look into the contention that these forms of “naïve” church art also demonstrated a collective awareness of native talent and creativity in translating metropolitan aesthetic standards to suit local sensibilities, modes of visual representation, and cultural habitus in far-flung but newly empowered trading and planting towns throughout the Visayas.

In the case of Sibonga, the patronage of talent resulted in a uniquely integrated visual design that completely immerses the upward-looking parishioner within the epistemic coordinates of canonic dogma and the mysteries of the Catholic faith. Rendered in a style that was both traditionally familiar and yet up-to-date, the program at Sibonga could be argued as the “default setting” of any Visayan church community during the 1920s before further inroads of modernization and shifts of taste would render this canonic convention irrelevant by the 1930s.

Argao: Transition from Canon to Decoration

In the case of San Miguel Arcangel at nearby Argao, however, the completion of the canonic program that Francia started would be abruptly terminated. It would be replaced by a more decorative approach to ceiling design that seems to indicate not only a fundamental change of artistic patronage but also a shift in attitude towards church ceiling painting as an effective means of visual education. In some ways, the decorative program at Argao extends some of the tendencies in Sibonga, where the ceiling’s decorative program followed a specific set of imagery via a series of bands containing central panels and secondary panels that progress from the choir loft to the apse of San Miguel Arcangel’s barrel-shaped vault. In this case, the decoration program honors the titular patron of Argao, Saint Michael the Archangel, and thus follows the theme of the history of angels as encountered in biblical scripture.

However, the contrast between the sections that cover the apse and the transept, and those that obscure the nave to the choir loft reveals striking differences not only in motific emplacement but also in the treatment of subject matter, decorative stylization, and depiction. The former [See Illustration 2 on the next page] is an ambitious and masterful deployment of iconography and catechism, weaving episodes from the Old Testament with the contemporary duties of Christians. It is divided into a quadripartite design framed by an elaborate trefoil arch centered on the apex of the transept (where the large brass censer is hung), and forms a pattern of four “broadswords” radiating away—an appropriately military motif teased out for the church’s patron. This division into four panels starts with the semihemispherical apse section that features a contrast between a fanciful building built on two levels that contains scenes from the Seven Sacraments; and an upper section with a mystical waterfall that culminates in a mystical depiction of the Trinity with the Virgin. The sections facing the transept wings each feature a separate episode from Genesis that shows the dueling aspects between the fallen angel (Satan) and Saint Michael, the Temptation of Eve, and the Expulsion from Paradise. Interestingly, the artists manipulated the circular space in these trefoil arches to insert the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil within these segments, continuing an organic motif that starts from these Trees and goes on throughout the rest of the frame, which is decorated in Francia’s familiar style of rose garlands. The last section facing the nave is perhaps the most dramatic and ambitious section of the entire ceiling program; it depicts the Battle of the Angels, fought between St. Michael on one side and Lucifer on the other. This apocalyptic episode, found in the Book of Revelations,⁷ and most notably exploited by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*, appears to have been truncated. The section depicting the red-skinned demons battling the angels abruptly ends, and commences with a different design program focusing on other Biblical or canonic instances of the appearances of angels.

The latter section, covering the rest of the nave ceiling, attempts to mimic the decorative program at Sibonga, anchored on a series of bands (eight, in this instance) that follows the tie beam holding the timbering of



ILLUSTRATION 2: Second and third panels of the quadripartite section at San Miguel Arcangel depicting the Temptation of Eve (left side) with the Expulsion from Paradise (right side). Note the ogive arches that terminate each panel, forming radiating sword patterns for the frames. PHOTO BY: Joselito A. de Guzman (taken May 2011).

the barrel vault together as its “borders.” Within each section is a central panel at the apex of the nave, followed by two side panels on the slopes facing the north and south walls.⁸ This section, however, is even more crudely painted compared with the lavish and carefully calibrated design of the transept and apse, leading us to affirm Savellon and Abaquita’s (2004, 11) assertion that “...such defects are definitely not characteristic of Francia’s work.” Rather, a local informant provides a partial explanation.

...Lola Laling (Geverola) maintains that it was Francia who was originally commissioned by the parish priest to paint the ceiling, but that, even before he was halfway through, a female friend of the padre persuaded the latter to let her cousin from Bohol take over. So Francia was able to paint only the apse and the transept; the remaining 2/3 was done by the cousin and his friends (15).

The name of this Bohol-based painter, unfortunately, has not been recorded, but the commissions for the ceiling paintings were handled by the parish priest, Fr. Julio Fernandez, who, Savellon and Abaquita maintains, was “the same priest who had the Sibonga Church ceiling painted. The task was started in 1928 (four years after that of the Sibonga Church) and completed in 1930. There were six painters who worked on the ceiling” (14). As an aside, Savellon and Abaquita also mentioned that the previous information was based “on the official version” (15), presumably that of existing parish records and other documentary accounts that were not cited.

The heterogeneous mixture found in the ceiling at San Miguel Arcangel begs the question: is the canonic program a sufficient rationale in determining what kind of painting results from the church commission? A comparative stylistic analysis seems to rule out consistency as a factor in determining this program. The formerly lavish, if not thematically militant treatment of the attributes of angels by Francia in the apse and transept is not sustained by the unidentified Bohol painter in the nave. Instead of continuing the established motif of a struggle between light and dark (or using the Catholic dogmatic convention, the narrative of the eventual triumph of good versus evil), the unidentified Bohol painter reproduces a rather bland set of scenes and allegorical devices that results in a more *decorative* effect, rather than sustaining a catechetical pedagogy started by Francia. Indeed, when one looks at the allegorical devices, as well as the sequence of the central panels, one is taken aback by the lack of dialectical consistency and a sense of chronological mismatch, with Old Testament scenes involving angels interspersed with new Testaments scenes in a seemingly random order. If canonic prescriptions, which require a clear dialectic progression from one earlier narrative to the next within a seamless discursive flow of meaning and truth assertion, are not the operating parameters, then what is the “design logic” of the ceiling at San Miguel Arcangel?

It is at this point that visual aesthetics within the cultural, political, economic, and ideological context of small town communities in southeastern Cebu has to be foregrounded. Since the production of these

ceiling paintings can be traced to a specific time frame in the early mid-20th century, we can postulate some conditions in which the patronage and practice of such ceiling paintings are anchored. Firstly, the rapid economic ascension of Cebu during the American colonial period, especially during the implementation of “special relations” (when agricultural exports from the Philippines to the United States at highly advantageous rates to the former thrived) from the early 1920s to the late 1930s, formed an arguable base of agricultural wealth concentrated on these trading and/or planting towns. The surplus would be invested by local elites in socially significant projects like enlarging private houses and engaging in lavish banquets and parties; building new public school buildings, parks, and plazas; and renovating or redecorating the town church. It was most likely that the “lady friend of the padre” at Argao was the sponsor of the church ceiling decoration herself, since only local patrons of the church’s fabric would be listened to and consented by the parish priest.

Secondly, that the tastes of these patrons were “uneven,” resulting in a change from the formerly valorized Francia to a now-favored Bohol artist (reputed to be the cousin of the lady herself) speaks of the secondary nature of canonic programming relative to the primary significance of social capital held by the investing patron. It also indicates the links and importance of personal attachment that define the relationship of this patron vis-à-vis the object of patronage, as well as the manner in which such patronage is consummated. Whether this shift in patronage occurred as a result of the disenchantment of the patron to Francia’s emerging design, or her own partiality to her cousin-artist is unknown, but a casual comparison of the stylization between the Francia portion and that of the unidentified Bohol painter reveals dramatic aesthetic differences.

Francia’s program is a dramatic and bold retelling of the obligations of faith and piety, as well as the risks of heresy and disobedience. By showing an almost Manichean splitting of the ceiling between the equally militant roles of angels and demons, Francia challenges the presumption of a congregation that cursory religious obligations are sufficient in

discharging the obligations of a parishioner. Instead, Francia shows how easily the chosen ones (Adam and Eve, for example) can become sinners in practically a single turn, as the ceiling shows. In addition, the unexpected formation of “broadsword” patterns resulting from the interlacing frames at the transept would have made this militaristic task of defeating evil clearer in the minds of viewers. Why this was not continued may speak of the attitudes of its patron towards this treatment of the frame (which is after all a strictly decorative affair). What is more, Francia’s dramatization of the battle of the Angels above the central part of the nave would not only have made the demons far more visually prominent than they should otherwise be, but the sudden truncation of that scene already shows deep conflicts between Francia’s apocalyptic vision of the ceiling program, and perhaps the more prosaic expectations of his patron.

By contrast, the unidentified Bohol painter’s design program is geometrically regulated according to an ascending order of arched coffers climaxing in rectangular panels at the apex of the barrel vaults, in which the predominant motif are the stylized rococo borders that define the panel frames of the allegorical devices, and are mirrored by the extravagant woodwork at the church that probably dates back to the late 18th century. Here, the emphasis is not so much on canonic consistency and instructional narration of the conflict between good and evil. The focus lies on a more pedestrian depiction of allegorical devices and biblical scenes featuring angels in pastel tones, which are done in a way that is as roughly naïf as Francia’s is “folk Romantic.” As has been noted earlier, the comparatively random nature of the sequence of scenes and devices in this section speaks less about the ability of the painter to achieve a canonic program, and more of the capacity to convert this program into a strictly *decorative* scheme that uses repeating motifs of regularly shaped coffers, *faux* wood frames and mouldings, and lightly-painted scenes that sharply contrast with the *sturm und drang* of Francia’s battling dualities.

One is thus tempted to believe that the abrupt shift in tone and treatment of the ceiling program at San Miguel Arcangel spoke of a newer

trend in decorating churches in Cebu: from the earlier, perhaps darker contrasts between figure and ground (if not between faith and heresy) that may have pervaded in the late 19th to early 20th century; to a later aesthetic that focused on lighter, gayer depictions of religious art (perhaps even copied or inspired from picture books and magazines of church interiors coming from Europe or Latin America) which evidently became more popular in the late 1920s to the mid-1930s—a pattern that would repeat itself in church commissions further south.

Dalaguete and Boljoon: Triumphs of Decorative Iconography

If one compares the extant ceiling paintings of San Guillermo de Aquitania at Dalaguete done by Canuto Avila and his assistants between July and December 1935,⁹ as well as that of Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio at Boljoon [See Illustration 3 on the next page], done by Mariano Villareal between 1930-1933,¹⁰ both exhibit a clearer bias towards a decorative approach in iconography rather than a canonic one. The earlier of the two, that at Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio, seems to continue the aesthetic of the unidentified Bohol painter at Argao. It reveals Villareal's use of large areas devoted to framing and coffering, the dominance of light, pastel colors, and the division of the nave into band-like sections dominated by a central panel at the apex of the barrel vault, paired with lesser panels on the north and south sides. However, the muddled, flat painting and uninspired pairings found at San Miguel Arcangel are absent at Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio. Instead, what greets the viewer is a series of larger, more impressive sections that divide the vault into six parts. Each section is highlighted by a central “medallion” motif that is paired by either two, four, or even eight side panels divided either axially or laterally.¹¹ The section over the “transept” section¹² serves as an anchor of the entire composition, with a large single circular panel terminating in a *faux* oculus centered upon a fanciful monogram bearing the name of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven. The painterly treatment is crisply done, with tonal contrasts of depicted motifs like building facades, shrubbery, and details



ILLUSTRATION 3: Details of the painted ceiling at San Guillermo de Aquitania at Dalaguete (upper portion) painted by Canuto Avila and Sons in 1935; and painted ceiling at Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio at Boljoon, painted by Mariano Villareal between 1930-1933.
 PHOTO BY: Joselito A. de Guzman (taken May 2011).

of allegorical devices seen clearly. What is more, however, is that Villareal seems to have established a clear preference for the framing scheme as a means to unite the disparate elements of the iconography into a tapestry-like organization of the ceiling. The framing scheme rationalizes the relationships between central and sidereal motifs through these geometric bands of decorative corncicing that sometimes appear bare of detailing, while at other times are encrusted with numerous geometric or floral details. This may be comparable to the Alberoni and Dibella scheme at San Agustin de Intramuros, where the various iconographic motifs are subsumed under a lush and ornate series of coffers, frames, and bands that unite the overall scheme of the ceilings into a single composition. Villareal, however, does not use a unifying tonal element of shading that produces in San Agustin a permanently ethereal lighting that results from the painted shadows and highlights of the ceiling scheme. Instead, the flat, decorative patterning, akin to that of fabric art, is reproduced in the ceiling of Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio, giving it a more naïve and “folk local” feel that may have been more in tune with the visual sensibility of the parishioners of Boljoon, rather than Villareal’s lack of mastery in the *tromp l’oeil* technique.

This flat patterning on the ceiling that replicates a tapestry is also seen at San Guillermo de Aquitania. Here, however, the ceiling framing is divided between architectural niches on the side panels and a rose-colored frieze band in the center that looks remarkably like the *calado* geometric and floral cutout patterns found in the eaves of colonial-era *bahay na bato*. Transposed into a frieze band, the *calado* patterns become a unifying motif that surrounds and frames each central motif down the nave, while the transept (this time with actual wings on the north and south sides) and apse again borrows from Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio’s motifs of a circular oculus motif followed by a large medallion above the altar.¹³ Another unique addition is the insertion of *faux* stone angels on plinths in the space of the engaged double columns that “anchor” the central medallions to the sides (called *aedicules*) and define the threshold of each niche, completing an architectonic program. These *aedicules* conform to the generally Roman Baroque theme established by the iconography and

stylization of the ceiling motifs, one that, though consistent with each other, conflicts with the general architectural style of the building itself. It is as if Avila and sons wished to transport their viewers beyond a provincial world and into the rarified realm of imperial Rome, which is suggested by the monumental *faux* architecture. However, this shift is disrupted by the native motifs that still remain, such as the *calado* design, and the pastel-colored but flat-toned planes that govern the vault's panelling. This resulting stylistic hybridity can be attributed to the dual forces of native nationalist awareness and metropolitan ecumenism that increasingly characterized not only parochial aesthetics but also the very real divisions and confluences between the Philippine Catholic Church and State at this period; the first Philippine Constitution after the American period was just recently approved, and elections that formed the Philippine Commonwealth Republic government were being held.

The later dates of the ceiling paintings at Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio and San Guillermo de Aquitania also indicate a shift in stylization that privileges the decorative form of religious iconography over that of a canonic program. The result is a replication of a fragmentary catechism, reproducing motifs based on mystical allegories, instructional devices of the church, and symbols as patterns that subdivide and "instruct" individual sections of the ceiling. It does not require viewers to progress from one motif to another in a sequential, dialectical flow, one that is exploited to the fullest at Nuestra Señora del Pilar. This seemingly sudden decision to eschew eschatological arguments in favor of a repetitive mystical symbolism also transforms the viewer's relationship with the ceiling from that of a linear narrative flow (akin to reading a devotional booklet) to a series of random portals where narration is acquired only upon intense reflection of the iconography. What results, then, is a more mystical and less didactic ceiling art. It also favors the treatment of the ceiling design as part of an overall decorative scheme in which motifs can be easily emplaced or rearranged without necessarily breaking up a larger narrative flow, allowing a dynamic choice of motific emplacement and thematic division to be implemented. That the ceiling designs at Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio

and San Guillermo de Aquitania followed a more decorative strategy compared with Nuestra Señora del Pilar, and perhaps were inspired by the second ceiling painter at San Miguel Arcangel, may be seen in the progression of increasing decorative frames and allegorical motifs. It also adheres to an eschatological program that systemically follows a progression of instructional images. It also seems evident that such a programmatic shift occurred during a moment in which the preferences of patronage also shifted to a more visually appealing scheme that favored lighter tones, brighter colors, and more playful motifs compared to the darker, heavier, and more dramatic tonal contrasts of the older canonic scheme. This may indicate that the conditions of patronage followed increasingly secular demands on church art to represent more the cultural sensibilities of the local elite, sensibilities that presumably focused on displays of visual ostentation and decorative patterning rather than grim catechism. This relationship between an assertive local secular patronage and the transformation of church ceiling art in southeastern Cebu can be gauged by looking at the last, perhaps most recent, sample of this study, that at Carcar.

Carcar: Modern Décor Triumphant

The Church of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, completed by 1871 under Fray Manuel Rubio Fernandez, was extensively redecorated in the mid- to late 1920s under the long-serving parish priest Father Anastasio Nuñez del Corro, also known as Padre Tatyong. It is at this period that the altar *retablo*, pulpit, and distinctive decorative sculptures of angels carrying electric candelabras along the nave were installed. The late 1920s was also the period in which Canuto Avila and his sons were said to have completed the ceiling paintings. However, if one observed the ceilings today [See Illustration 4 on the next page], both the motif and stylization of the painting scheme do not conform to what we know of the Avilas' manner of painting. Unlike San Guillermo de Aquitania, Saint Catherine of Alexandria does not have the monumental architectonic features, Neoclassical detailing in the frames, or niches containing saints and biblical



ILLUSTRATION 4: General view of the nave facing the altar at Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Carcar, showing the sculpted angels carrying candelabras, and the painted ceilings allegedly done by Vicente Poncardas in the late-1950s. PHOTO BY: Joselito A. de Guzman (taken May 2011).

scenes on the flat-timbered roof. Indeed, the flat timbering of the nave stands in contrast to the section closest to the apse, where the remains of the older barrel vault timbering are still to be found, along with the older, lower cornice level. Apparently, one of the renovations undertaken during the 1920s and a more recent wave of undocumented renovations between the late 1950s and the 1970s was the addition of an attic level at the nave, which opens up into a series of clerestory windows that allows light into the main nave. This was apparently done in order to increase the height of the nave and create a nave-aisle profile that closely matches major basilicas in Rome, such as the old Saint Peter's (before it was reconstructed from 1510 to 1605). This evidence of extensive renovation of the church's elevation is not found at the other four churches, all of whose vaults start at the cornice level where the vaulting course of the buttressed outer walls are located. Nuestra Señora del Pilar also has a nave-aisle profile, but does not have an attic level with clerestory windows. Instead, the large Gothic windows on its retaining walls are the primary source of light on the nave. Nuestra Señora del Pilar also has an arcade of columns that define the transition between the aisles and the nave, but these are made from wood, and are so slender as to be almost non-load bearing. By contrast, San Miguel Arcangel, San Guillermo de Aquitania, and Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio all follow the older convention of having windows on its thick coral stone curtain walls without an attic level, though Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio has a clerestory level immediately above the main windows, and form part of the upper register of the retaining wall.

The addition of an attic level at Saint Catherine of Alexandria also necessitated reinforcing the arcade that runs through the sides of the nave, whose load-bearing columns are now made from coral stone or concrete masonry, with a thick layer of *palitada* or lime plaster. The thicker arcade thus blocks the light from the windows on the retaining walls. It would have resulted in a gloomier interior had the clerestory windows not been pierced through the nave attic. Curiously, the aisle ceilings at Saint Catherine of Alexandria seem to copy the design motif of Nuestra Señora del Pilar, the form of a tiled diamond coffering centered on a bossed

rosette [See Illustration 5 on the next page]. Assuming that Francia and his assistants also executed the aisle ceiling paintings at Nuestra Señora del Pilar, one could argue that the unidentified designer at Saint Catherine of Alexandria simply transposed this design onto the aisle ceilings using more modern wood mouldings and frames. The modernity of this transposition can be seen in the more angular and simplified lines of the diamond coffer frames, and the flatter and mass-produced design of the sculpted boss rosettes, which are common after World War II, and no doubt date from at most the mid-1950s, if not slightly later.

The more extensive renovations of Saint Catherine of Alexandria also apply to the ceiling. Romulo Galicano, who grew up in Carcar, asserts that the flat expanse of the nave was done in the late 1950s by Vicente Poncardas, who lived in Carcar not far from the church, and was in fact a neighbor of the Galicanos (Galicano 2012).¹⁴ He also asserts that Poncardas' house, now ruined, used to also have a ceiling painted with a similar design as the church. Poncardas divided the flat ceiling at Saint Catherine of Alexandria into ten "bands" composed of a central square panel bordered by two smaller square panels each on the north and south sides that march off from the choir loft to the threshold just before the apse, where it reverts back to the older barrel vault. In comparison with the other four church ceiling paintings, the ones at Carcar are even more decorative, and appear "flatter" because of the plain, pastel-hued tonalities of the paint colors; the lack of chiaroscuro that often defined the older paintings; and the more rigid and linear quality of the design. The main design is composed of variations of the Mystical Rose motif centered on each panel, framed by a roundel and then superimposed on a dodecagonal *tromp l'oeil* golden frame which is bordered at each quadrant of the main square panel by vine garlands. The side panels, on the other hand, are of various coats of arms and floral motifs that are painted flat upon *tromp l'oeil* plaques. The overall impression is geometric and hard-edged, attempting to replicate the linear quality of timbering through the use of flat tones that frame the peach and ochre borders. One can arguably characterize this stylization as decidedly Modern because of the flat planar

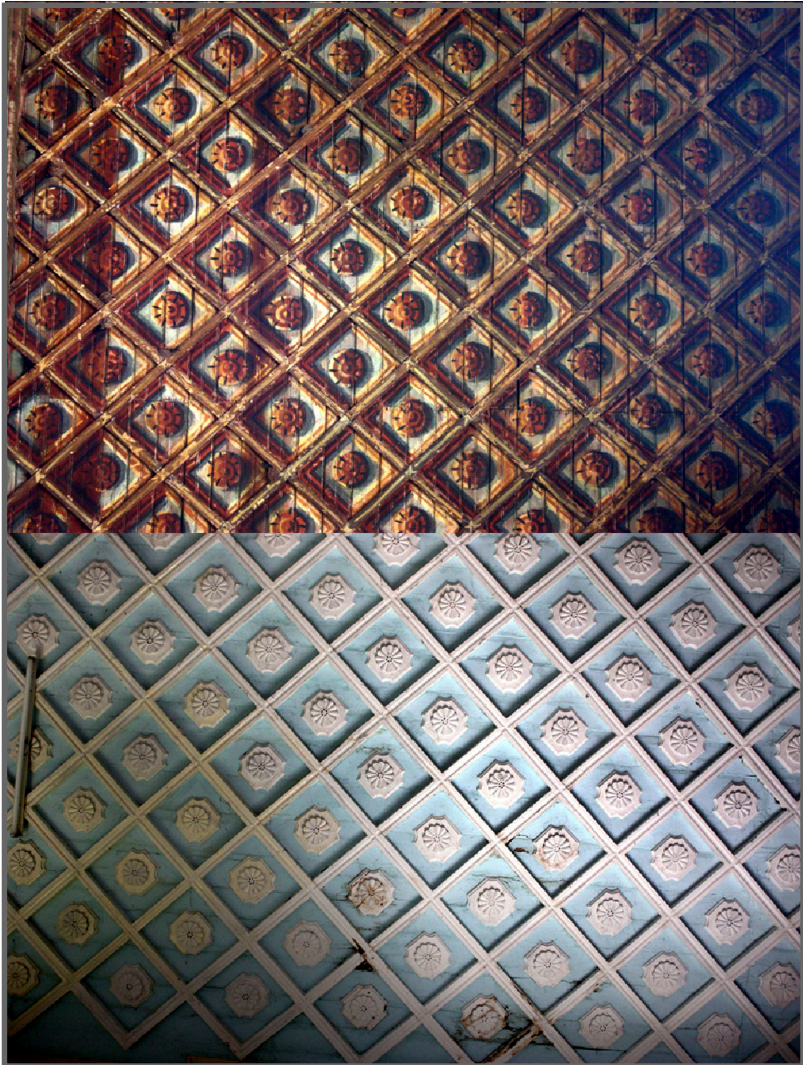


ILLUSTRATION 5: Comparison of the detail on the older aisle ceilings at Nuestra Señora del Pilar (top), showing the tiled formation of diamond coffers framing central boss-shaped rosettes; and the newer aisle ceilings at Saint Catherine of Alexandria (bottom), showing a similar tiled diamond coffer design framing a central rosette on a boss, done using woodworking instead of paint. PHOTO BY: Joselito A. de Guzman (taken May 2011).

design, the linearity, and the color value; it brings the local tradition of church ceiling painting firmly into the mid-latter part of the 20th century.

This modernity can also rationalize the decorative nature of the ceiling program, as motifs and symbols are increasingly abstracted and formalized into seemingly repetitive elements that are stabilized on the linear and planar regularity of a grid. Exuberant decoration is eschewed into minor details, as the few floral garlands are literally shunted to the corners of the main panels; at the same time, major motifs become highly hierarchized into rigid polygons and stamp-like impressions that float on vast fields of empty space. Reminiscent of coats-of-arms of family dynasts and warrior clans in Asia (especially Japan), the formality of these design motifs compares with the circular pendant design found in Turkish and Persian rugs, whose combination of calligraphy and mysticism is also circumscribed within allegory and abstraction. Its translation into the ceiling at Saint Catherine of Alexandria speaks of the artist's ability to visually reinterpret these aesthetic forms into the local setting, where regular patronage from a community well-known for its surplus economy affords the parish numerous occasions to renovate and "update" their decorative program to follow the latest trends and fashion in interior church design. Though this did not extend into the sculptural program as well as the architectural fabric itself, this kind of "updated patronage" could nonetheless be indulged in an area, ceiling painting, that is both comparatively recent in vintage and more inexpensive to execute.

Conclusion: The Economy of Nostalgia

What is ironic, however, is that with the advent of local tourism beginning in the late 1980s, the interiors of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, along with those of Nuestra Señora del Pilar, San Miguel Arcangel, San Guillermo de Aquitania, and Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio, among others throughout Cebu, have become chief sites of "cultural heritage" that appeal to a visitor's sense of nostalgia and imagined communion with centuries-old artworks. This appeal, and the subsequent efforts required to transform

the discourse of church art from instruments of catechetical instruction to artworks that speak of a unique cultural expression accessed by the travelling viewer, results in a hybridized epistemology of local culture that is either essentialized for its “folk Otherness” or valorized as manifestations of native national difference. A third knowledge system, formed by foreign visitors and writers like Gerschwiler, can also equate these ceiling paintings with a continuity of religious art that is valued for its comparative (if exoticized) articulation to ultimately Western canons and sources—ideas that are necessarily subscribed by the postcolonial order in rural Cebu. What each of these perspectives necessitate, however, is a common aspiration to re-view and recapture the general aesthetic of Cebuano church ceiling painting as aspects of larger epistemic formations introduced by modernity in Cebu: the rise of the folk nation; the interpellation of the global by the native; and the bonds that facilitate the exchange relations among materiality, spirituality, and aesthetics, and between local communities and the intervening systems of imperial cultures and polities that intersect in these artworks. As manifestations of pious sameness and political aesthetic difference, the ceiling paintings of these five southeastern Cebu churches continue to serve contemporary publics in ways that both reiterate the purpose of their existence (as instructional aids to Catholicism, and signifiers of social standing by their patrons and makers), while contributing to a newer economic logic in the continued development of a folk nationed narrative (Cebu as the Philippines) as part of a global region (Southeast Asia) caught in the throes of a self-denying modernity.

Notes

- ¹ Most significantly, the cash crop planting system, devised by the Basco Reforms from the 1780s onward and which put emphasis on producing chocolate and copra in Cebu, Manila hemp from Bicol, and sugar from Negros, was the primary beneficiaries of this opening, allowing local shipping from various towns to offload into Cebu City, and into cargo ships from Spain, Britain, the United States, and France, which reloaded them for export.
- ² A marble plaque installed above the stoup of holy water on its north wall near the main entrance details Sibonga’s dedication ceremony in Spanish: *Esta Iglesia ha sido Bendecida*

por Mgr. Jeremías Harty, Arzobispado de Manila, en 17 de Noviembre de 1907, después de la Bendición celebró Misa Pontifical, Mgr. Thomas A. Hendrick, Obispo de Cebu, predicando Mgr. J.P. Gorordo con asistencia de 17 sacerdotes y un inmenso gentio, siendo parroco el R.D. Francisco la Torre.

- ³ These are, in order of appearance from the façade to the apse: Baptism, Confirmation, Confession or Penance, Communion or the Eucharist, Anointing of the Sick or Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Marriage.
- ⁴ For the Baptism section, the panel facing the south wall features the Baptism of Christ at the Jordan River, while the panel facing the north wall is the Circumcision of Christ at the Temple. For the Confirmation section, the panel facing the south wall features the martyrdom of St. Peter, while that facing the north wall is the martyrdom of St. Sebastian. For the Confession section, the panel facing the south wall shows Christ forgiving the female adulterer, while that facing the north wall shows the parable of the manservant forgiven by the King—in this case, represented by Christ. In the Communion section, the panel facing the south wall features the miracle at the Marriage of Cana, while the panel facing the north wall is a mystical symbol of a stork feeding chicks in the nest. In the Anointing of the Sick section, the panel facing the south wall features Christ raising Lazarus from the dead; while on the panel facing the north wall is another mystical scene of a dying man visited by a priest, with a red-skinned demon on one side carrying a portrait of the Virgin. In the Holy Orders section, the panel facing the south wall features Peter answering the call of Christ at Lake Galilee; while the panel facing the north wall shows Christ as the Good Shepherd. Finally, the Marriage section features a panel facing the south wall with the image of the Immaculate Conception; while the panel facing the north wall features St. Joseph the Carpenter with the child Jesus.
- ⁵ Decisively introduced at the beginning of American rule in the Philippines, the use of newspaper comics illustration, called *komiks* in Pilipino, gained widespread currency after 1907, when *Lipang Kalabaw*, published in Manila, included highly charged satiric cartoon strip illustrations drawn by *Makahiya*, an assumed pen name of Jorge Pineda. Political aspirations of independence, or commentaries about local governance and social issues thus became represented and narrated for large reading publics throughout the Philippines through the use of *komiks*. Francia's adaptation of the *komiks* in mural painting could thus be argued as part of the visual cultural praxis of the period that melded mass communications with church art as visualized catechism.
- ⁶ In particular, Alberoni and Dibella's completion, in 1875, of the ceiling and nave *tromp l'oeil* decoration program for San Agustín at Intramuros is credited for fostering a mania among local churches for new painted ceilings, which continued until the eve of the Katipunan revolution. We may surmise that the translation of this particular aspect of late Spanish colonial church art patronage continued in the central Visayas region well into the early 20th century, among Filipino secular priests and parochial friars intent on mimicking the imperial grandeur of "Spanish-held" churches like that in Intramuros.
- ⁷ Revelation Chapter 12, Verses 7–9.

- ⁸ The sections portray the following (from transept to choirloft): Guardian Angel with Children, bordered by the Papal Seal of the triple tiara and keys on the south wall side, and a Cross and Anchor on the north wall side; Angel offering Christ a chalice in Gethsemane, with the Great Inundation on the south wall side, and Noah and his children giving thanks to the miraculous rainbow on the north wall side; Angel offering Elijah food in the desert, with the Mystical lamb on a table on the south wall side, and the Cross and Holy Eucharist with Veronica's Veil on the north wall side; Angel watching over the Call of Peter scene to the blind man, with Jacob's Dream on the south wall side, and Jacob worshipping the Angel on the north wall side; the encounter between Abraham and the Three Angels, with Bible and Crucifix on the south wall side, and a black Bible, flower, and spade on the north wall side; the Flying Angel of Revelations holding the flaming sword over the city, with Moses bowing before the Burning Bush on the south wall side, and Moses with the Ten Commandments on the north wall side; the Angel in the Assumption of Mary, with the Sacred Heart and Cross on the south wall side, and the Monstrance on the north wall side; and the Angel before Christ and the Female Sinner, with Saint Peter forgiving Saul on the south wall side, and Christ calling the Disciples from the Sea of Galilee on the north wall side.
- ⁹ Savellon and Abaquita note the following: "On the margin of the first frame (on the north wall nearest the choirloft, containing the image of *La Templanza*), the artist left this inscription: *Canuto M. Avial e hijos pintaron a esta Sta. Iglesia ciendo comenzando el 12 de Julio y termino el 16 de Diciembre de 1935* [35]. The inscription still survives despite a recent repainting in 2011 to "restore" the ceiling paintings, which had badly eroded and peeled.
- ¹⁰ Here, the accounts of Savillon and Abaquita conflict with the later research done by Paul Gerschwiler, a Swiss citizen who has since settled in Argao, and published *Boljoon: A Cultural Sketch* (2009). Savellon and Abaquita (16) assert that it was Antonio Villareal who did the Boljoon ceiling paintings, while Gerschwiler points to Mariano Villareal. Between the two, Gerschwiler has more in-depth documentation, and his book has the blessings of the Augustinian parish where Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio in Boljoon is constituted. Gerschwiler writes that "[t]he beautiful frescos (*sic*) on the vaulted ceiling were painted in from 1930-1933 by a son of a wide-spread family whose ancestral roots go far back in Boljoon: Mariano Villareal" (85). For this reason, the study takes Gerschwiler's position that it was Mariano, and not Antonio Villareal, who was the painter of the Boljoon church ceiling. Further clarification of this matter of documentation, however, is pending.
- ¹¹ The six sections, preceded by a decorative band featuring a stylized Golgotha Cross above the choir loft, are organized into the following themes (from choir loft to apse): a central motif of The City of God (in the form of St. Peter's basilica at Rome) with Christ looming over the sky, paired with panels on the Carpenter's House and the insignia of the Papal See on the south wall side, which are repeated on the north wall side; an Idealized Basilica surrounded by two Towers, a Cathedral, and a Monument featuring the Ark of the Covenant in quatrefoil pattern, which is doubled by smaller panels containing gated

gardens and fountains, and again framed on the north and south sides by lamps, flowers, and astronomical bodies; the great seal of the Augustinian Order surrounded by the *tolle, lege* scene and scene of missionary arrival in the Philippines on the south side, with the City of God and Cathedral Tabernacle on the north side; a quatrefoil central motif with the Monstrance at center, surrounded by instruments of the Office of the Priesthood, and bordered by the Ambry on the south side and the Hearth of the Sacrificial Lamb on the north side; a triple-banded Neoclassical roundel frame centered on an oculus panel with clouds and a floating royal monogram; and a central round panel with Monstrance surrounded by twin images of the Instruments of Christ's Passion on the south and north sides.

- ¹² Since Nuestra Señora de Patrocinio is built according to the rectangular basilica plan, there are actually no “wings” on the north and south sides that intersect to form a transept. Instead, an imaginary transept is produced in the otherwise continuous timber vaulting by the design of a larger painted section that aims to “center” the decoration scheme through this *tromp l'oeil* evocation of a domed structure pierced by an oculus, a Neoclassical device that adds upon the stylistic hybridity of the church fabric, as well as the stylistic heterogeneity of the painting decoration scheme itself, which mixes Neoclassical, Baroque Revival, as well as Vernacular forms together.
- ¹³ The motifs from the choirloft to the apse are as follows: niches containing the allegorical images of La Fortaleza (south side) and La Templanza (north side) followed by a central medallion of the Papal coat of arms; niches containing the image of Jonah and the Whale (south side) and Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from God (north side) followed by a central medallion of St. Peter's in Rome as the City of God; niches containing the Ark of the Covenant (south side) and Moses before the Burning Bush (north side) followed by a central panel containing the Cross and Globe; niches containing the loading of Noah's Ark (south side) and the Angel staying Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (north side), followed by a central rosette boss; the transept section containing medallion portraits of the Evangelists San Marcos and San Mateo (south side), and San Lucas and San Juan (north side) surrounding a large central *faux* oculus panel containing the Lamb of God, and rosette bosses on the joints of the transept's north and south intersections; and the apse section featuring the Holy Trinity in the central panel flanked by four identical angels, two each on the north and south sides.
- ¹⁴ This assertion by Galicano was bolstered by similar reminiscences of the ceiling paintings by senior artist Sofronio Y. Mendoza, who frequently traveled to Carcar during the 1950s as a young art student of Martino Abellana; as well as Dodong Tallo, Galicano's brother, who also grew up hearing masses at St. Catherine in the late-1950s.

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