

Inspirational Words on Culture and the Arts



Anak*, why art?

In this so-called quarantine era, is there room for the arts?

by Nick J. Lizaso

Many years back, in my talk to students at the Angono National School for the Arts, I strived to open the minds of the young to the value of being involved in the arts as creator or performer. But, alas, they complained that they were discouraged by their parents. “Walang pera sa sining. There’s no money in the arts.” That’s what was drilled into their young minds.

Since I can remember, parents of traditional upper class families would mandate their kids to take up law, medicine, engineering, architecture, or as a last choice, accounting. Nowadays, middle class families prefer their children to take up technical and practical courses that are more marketable such as nursing, culinary arts, IT, merchant marine, and other newly invented courses. Never mind if the kid’s aptitude is toward the arts.

In primary grades, the arts have been relegated to being club activities. In college, arts and humanities are now merely elective subjects. No wonder, many of our young graduates are materially predisposed but bereft of imagination and creativity.

I believe that we need the arts to save and enrich our nation’s soul. Art, to me, is the great equalizer. For there is something in art that we all respond to in a positive, endearing way. Harmony, grace, symmetry—whatever—these appeal to each human being on a deeper level.

Now more than ever, specially during these uncertain times, our people need the arts for their intrinsic ability to entertain, to delight, to challenge, to give meaning, to interpret, to raise awareness, to stimulate. Art nourishes the soul and heals the sick of body and mind.

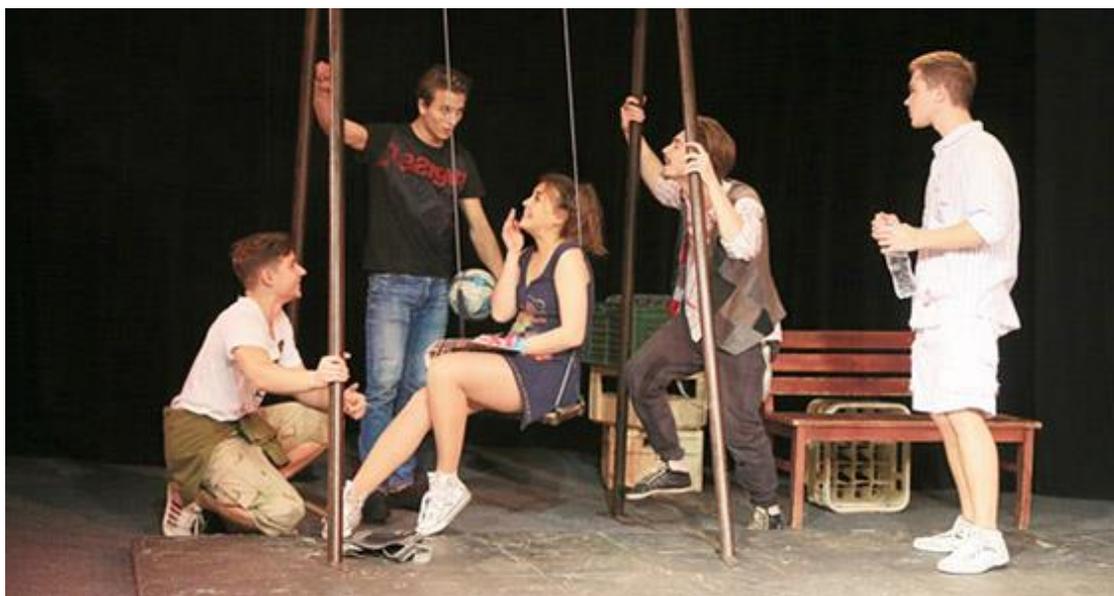
But now comes the nagging pesky question: Is there money in the arts?

I know of a painter in his late 60s who is now selling his paintings online during the long lockdown. The earnings are more than enough to sustain his family, at a time when his daughters are out of jobs.

Sometime ago, a local furniture designer was approached by a billionaire from the Middle East who purchased several millions of dollars worth of furnishings from him. Many Filipino illustrators are being contracted by a Hollywood animation studio to make animated movies. It wasn't long ago when a foreign theater impresario auditioned Filipino talents for casting in a new musical staged in London's West End.

What do all these have in common? Personal income for the artists. Tax money for the Philippine government. Who says there is no money in the arts?

And guess what? Arts and culture are now a country's potent assets to influence the world. They are now acknowledged as major drivers of national economies around the world. The world is turning upside down. Bumaligtad na ang mundo. Believe it or not, the arts and culture sectors are able to churn out an estimated \$250 billion in revenue every year, employing 29.5 million people worldwide. The arts are so important in developed economies that the UK is reported to be investing nearly \$2 billion in cultural institutions and the arts to help a sector that has been crippled by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.



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I also read something about the world's economy shifting from an economy based in manufacturing and heavy industry, to an economy where creativity and collaboration are at its very center. This new economy is called the "Orange Economy" or "Creative Economy," which includes all the sectors whose goods and services are based on intellectual property: visual and performing arts, crafts, film, architecture, design, publishing, games and toys, fashion, music, advertising, software, TV and radio, and videogames.

This means that the Filipino artists' time to shine on the global economic stage has come. Tinatanghal na ang mga alagad at taga-likha ng sining.

But to enable our country to excel in the so-called creative economy, we need to create an environment where young talents are encouraged to pursue their passion for the arts and allowed to give full expression to their creativity as artists.

Let us build the kind of future where art and music programs are alive in schools, where art museums are being opened, where scholarships are increasingly offered in performing arts colleges. There should be legislation that will make arts part of the curriculum and tools for teaching as early as primary grades up to college. The objective is to inculcate "art consciousness" in our youth. But most important, let us protect our artists for they are a neglected resource. We need to nurture our creators, performers, and workers who keep our arts alive.



This is why we need to push for the establishment of the Department of Arts and Culture, which among other things, will empower the Filipino artist and integrate and orchestrate all efforts to make the arts a potent force for development.

If there is a magna carta for domestic helpers, why not a bill of rights for art and cultural workers that is unique to their peculiar needs?

The envisioned Magna Carta should offer hope, and equal opportunity and provide equal protection to all artists regardless of class, age, and gender. It should include a set of incentives to lift artists and art workers from poverty, a sustaining system to enable them to be continuously productive and economically independent in an atmosphere of unfettered freedom.

With a thriving community of inspired and newly empowered artists who are seen as stalwarts of national development, nothing can stop us from making a mark on the world's cultural economy.

So, to the question of money-minded parents, "why art?" The answer is why not?
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Anak is a Filipino word and means "Child", so the title may be translated to: "My Child, why art?"