

## Antonio Austria

Antonio Gilbuena Austria, born on May 5, 1936, was one of the initial recipients of the Thirteen Artists Award in 1970. Born on May 5, 1936, Antonio's parents returned to the Philippines in 1937, amidst the tumultuous Sino-Japanese War, to settle in San Juan. As a young boy, Antonio spent countless hours meticulously reproducing his beloved comic book characters. He earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Santo Tomas in 1956, studying under modernists like Diosdado Lorenzo, Galo Ocampo, and Vicente Manansala. After graduation, he worked as a textile designer for ten years at Universal Textile Mills, exposing himself to the world of design for various linens.

Antonio's early artistic career included group exhibitions in various local and international shows, including the Australian Tour of Philippine Art in Saigon, the New York World's Fair, and the Tour of Contemporary Art of Asia in Tokyo, Hongkong, and Manila, as well as several yearly group shows at the Luz Gallery in the Philippines until 1969. In the same year, he returned to his alma mater as a Fine Arts Instructor and later became an Assistant Professor, a role he embraced wholeheartedly for 27 years. His artistic journey is primarily characterized by his 1959 victory at the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP) where he introduced "Magpapalayok," an oil on canvas work that expanded on his earlier thesis piece. This work offered a glimpse into the lives of local clay potters and vendors observed by Antonio from a factory in Rosario, Pasig. From 1959 to 1982, he developed a unique artistic style featuring painterly depictions of everyday local scenes. He showcased his works in numerous exhibitions across Manila, the Philippines, and internationally, including Australia, New York, and Japan.

For his contributions to the first Thirteen Artists Award in 1970, Antonio presented several oil on canvas paintings that captured the vibrancy of people's engagements with modern mobility in the Philippines, including works like "PUJ," "Pasaheros," and "Jeepney." His selection was also defined by his innate ability to find vitality in the composition of settings, such as his depictions of interiors and their dwellers from four paintings "Apartment 3A" to "Apartment 3D." Antonio's canvases come to life with the essence of genuine human experiences, from the ubiquitous Jeepneys to inviting sari-sari stores and lively billiard parlors. His genre compositions resonate with the unique energy of Philippine urban folk. His paintings emphasize painterly qualities and a vibrant energy that goes beyond mere representation, reflecting a will for a singular enjambment from the artistic norms of the time.

In the 80s to 90s works like "Tuyo," "Medicine Man," and "Tindera" showcased his intimate portrayals of these ordinary individuals—a woman vendor of dried fish taking a much-needed nap among her goods, a self-proclaimed folk healer selling remedies to the public with a megaphone on the streets, barrio weddings, billiard players, a mother and child sleeping on straw mats, and still-lives of common items found in a Filipino home. In 2016, the Cultural Center of the Philippines held a retrospective exhibition titled "6 Decades of A. G. Austria," showcasing Antonio's artistic journey. He continued to paint until his passing on June 27, 2023, leaving behind a lasting legacy of profound figurative artworks that speak to both the simplicity and complexity of Philippine life.

## References

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