

JUAN MARCOS G. ARELLANO
(1888-1960)

Outstanding Architect

An outstanding Filipino Architect in the American period, Juan Arellano was born on April 25, 1888 in Tondo, Manila. His parents were Luis C. Arellano and Bartola de Guzman.

Acknowledged as the builder of the Franciscan Church in San Juan, his father first worked under the Spanish city architect, Juan Hervas. Afterwards, he set up his own construction company and became, instead, *a maestro de obras*.

When, at the age of 12, Juan lost his father, he was placed in the guardianship of his older brother Arcadio, who was also an architect. He attended the Ateneo Municipal de Manila and, later, studied drawing and painting under the old masters of Philippine art: Lorenzo Guerrero, Fabian de la Rosa, and Toribio Antillon.

Sent to the United States by his brother, Juan studied architecture (instead of his earlier interest, painting) at the Drexel Institute of Philadelphia. After graduating with a degree in architecture in 1912, he pursued graduate courses in the university of Pennsylvania and at the Beaux Arts School in New York. He went on a tour of Europe before finally returning to the Philippines in 1917.

For a while, Juan worked in partnership with his brother Arcadio, and together, they designed the Casino Español and Gota de Leche buildings. After some time however, he decided to be on his own, and joined as assistant architect at the architectural section of the Bureau of Public Works.

In 1924, he won the top prize of 60,000 pesos in an international architecture contest sponsored by the Bank of the Philippine Islands. He headed the Board of Examiners for Architects in the years 1935, 1947, and 1948. From 1947 to 1948, he was the president of the Philippine Institute of Architects of which he became a fellow. He was named director of the National Planning Commission by President Elpidio Quirino, and from 1950 to 1954, served on the National Pantheon Board. In 1958, he received the Gold Medal of Merit for Architecture.

Like his contemporary and fellow architect, Antonio Toledo, Juan Arellano was influenced by the neoclassical and eclectic styles prevailing in the US during his stay there as a student. The old Congress building stands as a proof of this pervading influence. It bears the hallmarks of the neo-classical style: Corinthian pillars lining a vast colonnade, pilasters supporting every wall of the edifice. The Manila Post Office Building, built in 1926, and whose design is considered superior to that of the Congress building is another example of neoclassicism. It also has channeled Greek-Ionic columns which soar over a portico. An extensive hall or lobby that runs along the front part of the building is a practical feature – it shows the architect's concern for the public's convenience. Its upper floors are well ventilated and provided with natural lighting by an open patio. Arellano designed, too, the Villamor Hall of the University of the Philippines System in Manila, which housed the School of Fine Arts and Conservatory of Music. Done in the Renaissance style, the hall has an ante-chamber dominated by sculptures of the Muse of Music and Muse of Art by Guillermo Tolentino. Other buildings and structures he designed were the Occidental Negros Capitol Building in Bacolod, the pre-World War II Jones Bridge, and the Metropolitan Theater.

The Metropolitan Theater was built in the modern style, with motifs of Philippine Flora – like a frieze of native mango and its leaves on its ceiling – as part of its decor. Almost reduced to rubble during the last world war, it was recently rebuilt and restored.

Arellano believed that the Filipino must exalt his own native art, rather than western art, and in effect, become a nationalist. He considered the tribal art of Filipinos in the northern and southern region the only “true Filipino art,” which “evolved from within to without, from their soul, from their heart.” He lamented the fact that many artists and architects of his generation were blind to the presence of native art forms designs, and colors found in tribal art and functional pieces, such as the sheath of a Muslim *kris*, or *kampihan*, or the sail of a *vinta*. He longed for the day when Philippine architecture and the applied arts would reflect the soul of the “wild hills and rivers.”

Arellano, who was also an acknowledged aquarellist, was married to Naty Ocampo on May 15, 1915. They had one son, Oscar.

He died at the age of 72 on December 5, 1960.

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