



In conferring the PAFIOO Pamana ng Pilipino Award upon Roberto Eusebio R. Lavidés, the President recognizes his exemplary achievements in the arts and literature and staunch efforts in propagating Filipino culture and Dr. Jose P. Rizal's legacy among the Filipino diaspora that fostered cross-cultural understanding between Filipino and Canadian communities.

Roberto Eusebio R. Lavidés

Canada

Hometown: Gumaca, Quezon Province

In an age of rapid globalization and multiculturalism, maintaining a connection to one's cultural roots is paramount. For immigrants, this connection fosters mutual understanding and respect, weaving rich tapestries of diverse heritage into the fabric of their adoptive country. Roberto Eusebio R. Lavidés, a dedicated advocate for Filipino language and culture, has devoted his life to this noble mission, using the arts as a medium to promote understanding and appreciation of his homeland.

Creative Start

Roberto's journey began in the Philippines, where he established himself as a talented screenwriter, crafting stories that resonated with young audiences. His work on popular television programs like the much-loved children's shows *Ora Engkantada* and *Batibot* was instrumental in educating children about essential moral values through engaging narratives.

His script for *Ka Elias*, part of the acclaimed series *Balintataw*, garnered him recognition at the 12th Catholic

Mass Media Awards in 1989. Drawing inspiration from the works of Dr. Jose P. Rizal, particularly *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, Roberto's storytelling tackled profound themes of violence and social change, earning accolades for its emotional depth and intellectual rigor.

A New Chapter

In 1992, Roberto took a monumental step, emigrating to southern Ontario, Canada, to widen his artistic horizon while immersing in the Canadian spectrum. As he integrated into the Canadian mosaic, he carved his artistic presence in the Western world and channeled his creative energies into advocating for Filipino history, heritage, and values through various artistic mediums—painting, poetry, and writing. His work became a powerful tribute to Rizalism, seamlessly weaving Rizal's teachings into the contemporary narrative.

As a full-time narrative artist and creative director of his own studio galleries in Ontario, Roberto produces exhibits

and themed paintings and conducts art workshops, forums, and classes centered on Rizalism, Philippine history, heritage, and culture.

One of his most notable contributions is the International Rizaliana Art Tour, which he founded in 1996 to commemorate the centenary of Rizal's martyrdom. Over 28 years, this project has produced multiple series of exhibitions, collaborating with Filipino organizations, embassies, and consulates in successfully bringing Rizal's legacy to audiences across the globe.

The impact of this art tour series is particularly profound within Canadian communities. For Filipino-Canadians, especially the younger generation, Roberto's work instills a sense of pride in their heritage and strengthens their cultural identity. For older Filipino immigrants, his Rizal-themed paintings gave a nostalgic connection to their homeland, encapsulating shared experiences of migration and the ongoing struggle to preserve cultural values. Furthermore, his artwork introduces Rizal's ideals to a broader international audience, enhancing cross-cultural understanding and respect.

Rizalian Advocacy

The passage of a century has not diminished the legacy of the Philippine national hero. In fact, time has further highlighted Rizal's life and teachings, thanks to individuals like Roberto, who has consistently infused Rizal's essence and principles into his visual arts, writings, and advocacy efforts.

In 2011, Roberto furthered his mission during Rizal's sesquicentennial birth anniversary by initiating *chRizalis*, an event that featured studio gallery tours and lectures on Rizalism during Ontario Culture Days. This educational platform catered to both Filipino and non-Filipino students, enriching their understanding of Rizal's writings and their relevance in contemporary society. His monthly column, *Doctoring Rizal*, in *Balita*, a prominent Filipino newspaper in Toronto, provided a voice for his reflections on Rizal's vision, reinforcing its significance in today's world.

His commitment to propagating Rizal's teachings through his artworks and projects earned him prestigious acclaim, including the Distinguished Service Medal of Rizal from the Order of the Knights of Rizal in Canada in 2003. He was also named a third-degree Knight Commander in 2001.

Staying true to Rizal's principles, Roberto also champions non-violent resistance against social injustices. His 2003 poetry collection, *Remember Why*, delves into the depths of inhumanity in the context of global conflicts, genocide, and terrorism. This book of poems was highly praised for its emotional intensity and

philosophical depth and was archived at the National Library of Canada, serving as a poignant reminder of the costs of violence.

In his dedication to peace, Roberto founded the Heroes Hall project, an exhibit honoring global figures who advocated for peaceful change. This initiative elevates Rizal as an international symbol of peace and encourages viewers to recognize the sacrifices made by heroes for the dignity of sovereignty, democracy, progress, and peace.

As a result of his editorial undertaking and literary writings featured in the monthly publication of *Kultura*, a Canadian multicultural magazine of the arts, he was recognized with a Media Race Relations Award by the Human Rights and Race Relations in Toronto in 2001.

Empowering Through Education

Roberto's influence extends beyond art; he has played a pivotal role in introducing Filipino language courses and programs in Ontario. His Creating Art, Making Peace (CAMP) initiative, running from 2008 to 2011, blended visual arts, theater, and poetry in an interactive workshop for elementary and high school students. This innovative approach equipped students from diverse backgrounds with artistic and life skills, fostering a deeper appreciation for diversity, non-violent resistance, and social justice.

As a Filipino language instructor, Roberto has also been instrumental in establishing Filipino classes in Ontario schools. His impact reached the airwaves as well; from 2008 to 2010, he co-hosted *The TagLish Radio Show* on CFMU 93.3 FM, providing a platform for discussing relevant issues within the Filipino community and facilitating dialogue and connection.

Cultural Dignity

Throughout his illustrious career, Roberto has remained unwavering in his commitment to using his talents to enrich understanding, compassion, and elevate cultural dignity. His artistic contributions have become vital cultural touchstones for Filipino communities in Canada and beyond, offering profound reflections on the Filipino experience.

Today, Roberto's work stands as a testament to the enduring power of art in bridging cultures, preserving history, and fostering respect for diversity. His lifelong dedication not only enriches the cultural landscape of his new home but also serves as an inspiring reminder of the importance of staying connected to one's roots, ensuring that the stories and legacies of those who came before us continue to resonate in the hearts of future generations.