

Foto A Foto: Un Retrato De Espana

Photo by Photo: A Portrait of Spain

Accion Cultural Espanola (AC/E) stages *Foto a Foto*, photography exhibition in Manila in conjunction with the Spanish Embassy. The exhibition marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of the Filipino poet, physician and independence hero Jose Rizal, who wrote both in Spanish and Tagalog. Towards the close of Spain's colonial era, he advocated the representation of the Philippines in Spain's parliament, equal rights for the Spanish and indigenous populations, freedom of speech and assembly, and the gradual substitution of Spanish clergy by natives in dioceses and parishes. His writings were used to fan the flames of the independence struggle, which led to his execution for treason, a charge which he denied to the end.

Following independence, the relations between the Philippines and Spain gradually improved, thanks to the strengthening of cultural relations. This is the context – the mutual acquaintance of the two peoples through culture – in which the *Foto a Foto* exhibition is being held. Curated by Chema Conesa, it displays the work of 15 photographers who captured the essence of the past six decades of Spanish history.

The 60 photographs in the show reflect the country's transformation from the internationally ostracized Franco dictatorship into a robust and modern democracy via an exemplary political transition. The images show some of the key moments of this progression.

The photographs dating from the middle decades of the last century portray a stark black and white country marked by shortages, repression, lack of freedom, and many hardships. But they are followed by others depicting Spain's rise to take its place among the world's most developed countries. Fashion, urban development, the plurality of races and ethnic groups in our neighbourhoods, and towering skyscrapers are pictured to show what Spain had become at the beginning of the new century.

The photographs retain the immediacy and power of the instants in which they were taken, and the colors, textures, and ways of life of bygone days. While memory is a powerful instrument for enshrining the past, it is but a fragile means of doing so objectively, and without retaining, obviating, or arranging the data of reality, it is too vulnerable. But photography is a cultural vehicle of the first magnitude, since it shows in a handful of images a country's capacity to reinvent itself and to adapt to the reality of their environment in a very short time. In this exhibit, the Spaniard display themselves through their artists, and via their work open a door to the Filipino people to help bring the two closer.

On the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Jose Rizal, Accion Cultural Espanola (AC/E), the Embassy of Spain in the Philippines and the Metropolitan Museum of Manila present the exhibition *Photo by Photo, A Portrait of Spain*, a visual trajectory showing the evolution of Spanish cities and their inhabitants from the fifties until the present day.

The exhibition comprises the work of fifteen photographers who, from the middle of the last century up to the present, have carried out their work starting from their personal approaches and visions that differ not only in the content but also in the aesthetic way of addressing the representation.

Photo by Photo, A Portrait of Spain opens at the Tall Galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Manila on October 25, 2011 up to January 15, 2012. The Met is located at Banko Sentral Ng Pilipinas Complex, Roxas Boulevard, Manila. For more information call 5211517 or visit their website at www.metmuseum.ph.