

Intellectual and Social Currents in Establishing Manila's Academia de Dibujo y Pintura (1821–1834)

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This essay examines how the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura, the first secular institution for artistic instruction in Southeast Asia, emerged in the 1820s in the Philippines through the interplay of individual agency and broader socio-intellectual currents. While standard accounts credit the Chinese-mestizo painter Damián Domingo (1796–1834) with founding the Academia, this study instead situates him within a wider network of civic organizations, Enlightenment intellectuals and merchant patrons. These historical currents are considered active forces that shaped the institutionalization of art education and the redefinition of artistic labour in colonial Manila. Domingo is recast not as an originator in isolation but as a cultural worker whose practice responded to the liberal ideas circulating among Manila's educated and commercial elite. The essay also explores how the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País helped cultivate a creative class that connected the colony to wider imperial circuits, thereby influencing the foundational terms of Philippine art and pedagogy.

Keywords: art school, colonial policy, ilustrado, Enlightenment in Southeast Asia, intellectual networks, Chinese-Spanish relations.

The founding of the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura (Academy of Drawing and Painting, hereafter, Academia) in the Philippines in 1821 is recognized as a significant milestone in early modern artistic practice in Southeast Asia (Clark 2021, p. 56; Ushiroshoji 2018, p. 131). While documentation of its origins is sparse, the story has been recounted by various scholars. Historians Carlos Quirino (1961, 1967), Santiago Pilar (1976, 1979) and Luciano Santiago (1990,

1991, 2000) elaborated on the life and work of Damián Domingo (1796–1834), the Chinese mestizo credited with initiating the Academia in 1821. In a brief section of his first book, art historian Patrick Flores (1998) revisited these narratives, probing ambiguities in the historiography and raising questions about the exact role of the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País (Economic Society of Friends of the Country, hereafter, Sociedad). Flores’s study concludes without exploring the ideological foundations of the Academia or its role in Manila society—specifically, why and how Filipinos prioritized establishing an art school when other, more practical institutions might have seemed more deserving of philanthropic support.

While Domingo’s role in the founding of the Academia has been well documented (Joaquin and Santiago 1990; Ongpin 1983), the Sociedad’s contribution to the institution’s establishment has received far less critical attention. The most comprehensive study of the Sociedad, by Maria Luisa Rodriguez Baena (1966), focuses on its eighteenth-century activities, leaving its nineteenth-century history underexplored. Given this historiographic gap, a re-examination of the Sociedad’s 1819 revival can shed light on its entanglement with broader reformist agendas, particularly its pioneering role in the establishment of artistic institutions. Along with recent economic histories that call for rethinking earlier accounts, this article draws on recently digitized Spanish and Philippine materials via archival portals that offer unprecedented access to the Sociedad’s corporate records and close visual analysis of the Academia’s artistic production.¹ Taken together, these sources illuminate the intellectual and social currents that shaped Damián Domingo and the Sociedad Económica in the establishment of the Academia in 1821.²

Scholars have long traced the origins of Philippine nationhood to the late nineteenth century, when secular art and culture emerged as central to civic identity. This focus, however, has recently faced criticism for its Eurocentric framing and its complicity in revisionist reinterpretations of postcolonial nation-building (Lopez and Gommans 2022, p. 9). For this reason, this study anchors the narrative earlier in the century—before the well-studied activities of the educated middle

class called *ilustrados*—arguing that the Academia was not just an isolated institutional innovation that was an offspring of agricultural development but also part of a continuum of civic reform rooted in Manila's liberal intellectual and mercantile networks.

The historiographic tendency to treat the founding of the Academia as an exceptional or isolated event has obscured its embeddedness in the aspirations of Manila's civil society to promote educational and economic reform. While previous accounts emphasize individual agency—particularly that of Domingo—they often neglect the structural conditions that made such agency legible. This article has three primary aims: first, to decentre biographically driven narratives of the Academia by foregrounding the social and ideological currents that informed its relationship with the Sociedad; second, to examine the interactions between key figures within these overlapping institutions, tracing how they negotiated at a moment when artistic practice had become closely bound to questions of social mobility and cultural reform; and third, to reassert the Sociedad's role as a formative force in the institutionalization of art education. In this light, Domingo is reconsidered as a painter whose labour intersected with broader reformist ideals circulating within Manila's emergent intellectual and commercial elite.

The emergence of the Academia demonstrates how artistic labour in the colony paralleled shifts in industrializing Europe, where the boundaries between art, craft and industry were increasingly contested. As art historian Tim Barringer (2005, pp. 315–21) observes, nineteenth-century British artists were often caught between aesthetic ambition and the imperatives of labour discipline and class structure. Domingo and his students similarly straddled the domains of image-making within the bounds of institutional standards. Their practice—serving religious, industrial and ethnographic purposes—aligned with broader patterns of visual production that, as Stephen Eisenman's survey (1994, pp. 310–31) of art in the long nineteenth century argues, integrated artistic labour into administrative and industrial systems. In this regard, understanding the aesthetic and political context of the Academia reframes nineteenth-century

Philippine art not as peripheral imitation, but as a critical node within global processes that bound aesthetic production to commercial and bureaucratic regimes of labour.

Manila's religious colonial context sharpened the tension between aesthetic value and commodification, an ambivalence central to Domingo's practice. As Rosalind Blakesley (2006, pp. 12–29) and Linda Merrill (1992, pp. 35–41) show, nineteenth-century artists often navigated competing demands of market and institution. Domingo, as both image-maker and educator, operated within a similar logic of standardization and visibility. Though framed by academic paradigms, his work reveals how vernacular visual practices have been assimilated into imperial labour regimes, while also shaping new professional identities.

This study uses social categories commonly employed during the Spanish colonial era. *Peninsulares* were Spaniards born in Spain who held the highest colonial offices, while *creoles* (*criollos*, *insulares*) were Spaniards born in the Philippines and often excluded from such positions (Brading 1991, p. 502; de Llobet 2011, p. 267; McCoy and de Jesus 1982, p. 10; Aguilar 1998, p. 133). The term *mestizo*, unless otherwise specified, denotes persons of mixed Chinese and indigenous ancestry—officially called *mestizos de sangley* until the late eighteenth century, a prominent group in Manila (Lee 2024; Aguilar 2023, p. 320; Escoto 2000, p. 209; Rafael 2005, pp. 61–62). *Mestizos* occupied intermediary social positions, while the *principalia* were native elites granted formal privileges (Simbulan 2005, p. 26). *Indio* refers to the indigenous Christian majority (Rafael 2018, p. 5). The term “Filipino” at the time usually applied to *creoles*, though it was later expanded to include migrant labourers from indigenous and mixed-race populations (Scott 1994, pp. 6–7; Seijas 2014, p. 161). In this article, “cultural worker” designates an individual involved in cultural production—such as an artist or educator—who contributed to the colony's political and intellectual life (Barringer 2005, pp. 315–21; Eisenman 1994, pp. 310–31).³

The discussion proceeds in three thematic sections. The first section, “Intellectual and Social Currents”, traces how the revived

Sociedad Económica and the Real Compañía de Filipinas created the reformist environment that made the Academia possible. It outlines how physiocratic policies, merchant networks and the selective rehabilitation of Chinese-mestizo communities shaped Manila's institutions while exposing the racial tensions that structured artistic and economic life. The second section, "The Emergence of the Academia", follows the convergence of earlier proposals for technical drawing schools, the Sociedad's civic agenda and Domingo's own atelier, showing how, in 1823, the Academia adopted an explicitly inclusive admissions policy and became embedded in broader programmes of scientific education and artisanal reform. The third section, "The Academia and Artistic Labour", examines Domingo's self-portrait, his *tipos del país* (types of the country) and Lozano's *letras y figuras* (letters and figures)—watercolour portraits depicting colonial scenes and inhabitants—to show how the school legitimized artistic labour, transformed workshop practices into academic training and enabled mestizo artists to convert artistic skill into civic status within a creolized Enlightenment framework. In this section, the Academia is situated at the centre of colonial knowledge-making, showing how aesthetic practices during its first thirteen years helped consolidate the cultural legitimacy of art making as a professional field. In conclusion, this study reflects on the broader legacy of the Academia by tracing how its aesthetic values and civic engagement led to the emergence of modern Filipino artistic identities.

Intellectual and Social Currents

Spain's first economic society was the Real Sociedad Bascongada de los Amigos del País (Royal Basque Provinces Society of the Friends of the Country), which was founded in 1765 in Azkoitia, Gipuzkoa, by Basque men of influence. Within Enlightenment Spain and its overseas territories, the Sociedades de Amigos del País were moulded as economic and cultural associations whose primary activities included historical and linguistic studies, the promotion of agricultural and industrial development, and the dissemination

of scientific and cultural information. In vetting economic projects, the sociedades relied on the ideas of physiocracy, which defined wealth as rooted in land productivity and agricultural rationalization (Kaplan 2019, pp. 701–3).

Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes, Spanish minister of the Treasury in 1760, established the model for the sociedades that proliferated during the Bourbon reform era (Brading 1991, pp. 502–3; Barral Martínez 2013, p. 10). Campomanes (1774, p. 141) identified the nobility as the appropriate social stratum to develop the land because they owned it and they were *más instruida del país* (the most educated in the country) (Barral Martínez 2013, p. 2). However, the nobility's failure to enact reform gave way to a new class of traders, industrialists and professionals who took up the reformist mantle.

When King Carlos III (1716–88) sent Governor General José Basco y Vargas (1733–1805) to the Philippines in 1778, the colony was viewed as a distant and neglected outpost of a troubled empire (Rafael 2018, p. 4). Tasked with reform, Basco was charged with strengthening the local office of the *real hacienda* (royal treasury) in Spain and instituting a new economic order.

The Manila Sociedad was founded in 1781 against this backdrop of imperial anxiety and proposed reform. At its inauguration, Basco presented a general economic plan, making a dramatic appeal to physiocratic ideals. “When will we free ourselves from the error of depending on foreigners for our commerce and provisions?”, he asked (Corpuz 1997, p. 92). In advancing administrative reform, he argued that “pseudo-traders” or merchant-class middlemen needed to be removed from the colonial bureaucracy (p. 91). Most colonists, however, clung to mercantilist practices, viewing physiocratic ideals as a threat to their entrenched economic privileges (Legarda 1999, pp. 71–73; de Comyn 1820, p. 53).

To shift focus from mercantilism to the cultivation of land and resources, the Manila Sociedad launched educational and technical initiatives. It imported and distributed books, published informational tracts and issued circulars for government officials. Recognizing the role of education in producing a skilled workforce, the society

offered both local and foreign scholarships and sought to establish an agricultural school (Malibiran y Martinez 1886, p. 11). It also sponsored programmes ranging from crop subsidies to the importation of machines designed to boost agricultural and artisanal production (Anduaga 2022, p. 388).

Many members of the Sociedad held bureaucratic posts and enjoyed the support of the governor general. Consequently, the Sociedad's activities were subject to the shifting political climate. Educational projects, however, received broad support. The Sociedad's first infrastructural project was an elementary school launched in 1785; its second was a spinning and linen school aimed at strengthening the traditional textile industry. Because of its progressive outlook, the Sociedad frequently clashed with friar orders and other colonial authorities who pursued parallel—and at times conflicting—educational agendas (Corpuz 1997, pp. 106–14; de Llobet 2011, pp. 267–84).

Although the Sociedad initially succeeded in promoting export crop development, it became inactive between 1787 and 1819 because of political upheavals that led to the Peninsular War (1808–14). Its activities were again suspended briefly towards the end of the Mexican War of Independence from 1820 to 1822 and during a cholera epidemic in Manila.

To better understand the reformist politics of the Sociedad's members, one must consider a parallel development in the colony's economic life. On 10 March 1785, King Carlos III established the Real Compañía de Filipinas, a state-sanctioned trading monopoly.⁴ Its goal was to bring goods from the Philippines, China and Japan to Spain while promoting the cultivation of export crops. Despite expanded trading opportunities in 1785 and 1789, the company faced strong competition from European and American merchants.⁵ To support its growth, Spain repealed laws prohibiting Oriental imports and, in 1788, exempted Philippine products from export duties.

Over time, the Compañía became a centre for economic liberalism. Its members increasingly pursued private enterprise, particularly amid growing intra-Asian trade, including the opium trade (Permany-

Ugartemendia 2014, pp. 156–57). Company agents (factors) played a key role in reviving the Sociedad in 1819, re-establishing a network of business and cultural elites. Among the newly active members were the *hijos del país*—Philippine-born intellectuals—who added the title *amigos del país* to the name of the Sociedad (shifting from “Real Sociedad Económica de las Islas Filipinas”)⁶ and were ideologically aligned with Basco’s earlier critique of the colony’s underdeveloped industry, a critique once denied by the colonial elite (Legarda 1999, p. 73).

The Compañía’s role in the revival of the Sociedad had a direct impact on the founding of the Academia, as reflected in its Articles of Incorporation. Articles 51 and 52 required the company to provide free passage to the Philippines aboard its ships for artisans and professors specializing in mathematics, chemistry and botany. These artisans were also to be supplied with the necessary tools for their trades. Article 53 stipulated that up to one-third of the ship crews could be composed of Philippine natives, regardless of race, origin or social status, and that they were to receive equal treatment and opportunities for promotion based on merit, alongside their European counterparts (Legarda 2009, p. 79). This emphasis on education and racial equality would later be echoed in the foundational documents of the Academia, as will be discussed further.

The spread of Enlightenment ideas in the Philippines involved active participation from “intra-imperial networks, peripheral actors, and hybrid communities”, which helped shape both government-led and civilian institutions (Anduaga 2021, p. 564). Rather than simply diffusing from a dominant European centre, these ideas evolved through a dynamic feedback loop, fostering reciprocal exchanges between the colonies and the metropole (Raj 2017, p. 52).

This intellectual traffic also extended into the colony’s commercial and social spheres, where merchant networks and overlapping memberships in the Sociedad and the Compañía played a pivotal role. These networks functioned not only as economic engines but also as sites of intellectual exchange, significantly influencing Manila’s economic and social landscape during this transformative

period. While Peninsulares—mostly Basques—and criollos wielded considerable influence as members of the Sociedad, Manila's Chinese residents and their descendants from intermarriages with the native population also vied for economic and social power (*Los Economistas* 1877; Chia 2006, pp. 509–34; Sugaya 2000, pp. 553–70). By the late eighteenth century, both colonial officials and Manila traders had begun expressing concern that this Chinese-mestizo group might come to dominate the colonial economy. Despite their reliance on Chinese labour and enterprise—especially in the context of the Manila Galleon trade—many resented mestizo control over the manufacturing and retail sectors.

The reach of Chinese networks across Southeast Asia became evident in historical accounts documenting periodic massacres and expulsions of Sangleys—in 1603, 1632 and 1669—which continued to cast a long shadow over Chinese-Spanish relations and culminated



FIGURE 1 Fernando Brambila, *El Parián, Mercado de Manila* (Parián, a Market in Manila) (Source: Ravenet 1789–94)

in the so-called Red Christmas Massacre during the British invasion of Manila in 1762 (Lee 2024, p. 124; Borao 1998, pp. 28–30). The broader impact of these atrocities on the colonial economy remains understudied. Nevertheless, even present scholarship on eighteenth-century Manila shows that shifting trade routes and policies of selective readmission of the Chinese had a severe impact in shaping regional commerce (Permanyer-Ugarteandia 2020, p. 121; Escoto 2000, p. 209; Aguilar 2023, p. 319).

The late eighteenth century marked a significant improvement in the status of the Chinese in Manila, as illustrated by Juan Ravenet's print *El Parián, Mercado de Manila* (The Parián, a Market in Manila) (Figure 1). The image depicts a bustling market scene in the Alcaicería de San José (Market of Saint Joseph), built within Intramuros, Manila, in 1783, where Chinese merchants, friars and indios engaged in relatively orderly commercial exchange. Unlike earlier parían compounds—located outside the city walls for security reasons and often destroyed during periods of unrest—the new alcaicería represented both a symbolic and practical step towards integrating the Chinese more securely into the colonial economy.⁷ Constructed on the ruins of the barrio of Mabolo, which had been devastated during the British Occupation (1762–64), the alcaicería was envisioned as both a marketplace and a regulatory enclave.⁸ This normalization of Chinese presence was largely the result of Basco y Vargas's reformist policies. By relocating Chinese commerce within the fortified city, Basco y Vargas emphasized both the essential role of Chinese artisans and traders in Manila's prosperity and the Bourbon administration's effort to balance economic pragmatism with long-standing anxieties over potential Chinese uprisings (Buceta y Bravo 1851, vol. II, p. 229; Wickberg 1964, pp. 63–65).

This same logic informed the mission of the Sociedad Económica de los Amigos del País, which likewise sought to incorporate Chinese and mestizo craftsmen into Manila's artisanal economy. To illustrate this point, had Domingo been born a generation earlier, he would have been affected by forcible expulsions from 1767 to 1772, which barred Chinese suppliers and businessmen—along with their goods

and wares—from participating in Manila's economy. The measure rendered artisans of Chinese descent effectively unemployable and restricted their access to civic life. Its repeal in 1778, however, allowed Domingo's family to remain in Manila and paved the way for his ascent within a city newly reorganized around institutions that sought to harness, rather than exclude, the skills of Chinese craftsmen. Born around 1796 in Tondo, across the Pasig River from Intramuros, Domingo achieved a stature in Manila's racially segregated society that enabled him to marry Luisa Casas in 1818.⁹ Luisa was the daughter of Ambrosio Casas, captain of the mestizo battalion and a cannon manufacturer for the Spanish navy (Clotet 1915, p. 1). The Casas family was held in high esteem in colonial society and enjoyed exemption from the payment of tributes.¹⁰

The partial rehabilitation of the ethnic Chinese under Basco's liberal reforms reveals the selective nature of Enlightenment rationality in the colony. Although celebrated in Philippine history as a triumph of racial liberalism, earlier efforts by the Sociedad to establish the Academia in the late eighteenth century were simultaneously undermined by lingering racist policies in education, which continued to exclude the Chinese community from full participation in civic and cultural life.

This contradiction helps explain why historians from Santiago (1990; 1995) to Flores (1998) treated the first iteration of the Academia with a degree of ambivalence, assessing it as underdeveloped largely because it had yet to display the expected Iberian academic imprint, rather than recognizing how its early practices reflected other artistic streams, including Chinese ateliers, local workshop traditions, and Manila's mercantile networks, which were unaccounted for in peninsular models. Insights from economic historians of the period, however, suggest that the institution's liberal aspirations cannot be understood apart from the broader structures of colonial power. Far from exceptional, the Academia's visual practices were deeply entangled with the reformist economy of the colony and reflected both the aspirations and anxieties of an emerging creative class—of which Domingo was a central figure. His work within the Academia

crystallized the paradox of colonial liberalism: an economic system that enabled the professional ascent of mestizos and criollos, while denying them full autonomy. These groups of Manila-born residents who had interacted more frequently in spaces like the Academia and the Sociedad started calling themselves Filipinos or *amigos del país* (Scott 1994, pp. 6–7).

From the late eighteenth century, colonial administrators viewed the development of technical and artistic skill not as isolated cultural pursuits, but as components integral to a broader effort to modernize the colony's productive capacities. Drawing or design (*dibujo*), in particular, was treated as a practical skill necessary for agriculture, engineering and manufacture (Cruz Gutierrez 2025, pp. 63–65; Anduaga 2022, p. 388).

The Sociedad's proposals to establish agricultural schools and introduce machinery were likewise tied to a vision of a trained labour force capable of designing, building and innovating within local industries. Reforming guild practices—perennially characterized by religious and racial exclusions—was seen as crucial to rationalizing labour and aligning artisanal production with the colony's evolving political economy (Wickberg 2000, pp. 37–38; McCoy and de Jesus 1982, pp. 124–26).

Physiocracy, as adopted by the Peninsular-dominated Sociedad in the late eighteenth century, linked economic value to land productivity. This linkage justified reforms in agriculture and infrastructure, while also reinforcing elite control over land and labour (Kaplan 2019, pp. 701–3; Barral Martínez 2013, p. 10). At the same time, merchant networks—particularly among mestizos—supplied the logistical support and personnel that facilitated the creation of new institutions (Wickberg 2000, pp. 108–11).

By the early nineteenth century, Enlightenment ideals promoted by the Sociedad helped reshape Manila's cultural sphere as the exchange of knowledge and creativity continued to flourish alongside trade. The spread of rationalist thought and the rise of the illustrated book contributed to the perception of an art academy as a vital instrument for economic progress (Villaroel 2012, pp. 209–18). In this context, the push for a secular art school found support across various sectors

of society, including progressive members of the clergy, many of whom appeared in the membership rolls of the Sociedad (de Mas y Otzet 1877, pp. 1–42).

In the 1820s, the Philippine colony entered a period of economic stagnation, driven by the declining viability of mining and spice cultivation. With the end of the galleon trade in 1815, Manila shifted from functioning as a global trading hub to focusing on a more inward-looking economy (Legarda 1999, p. 89).¹¹ In this context, the consolidation of secular art education depended not only on financial flows but also on the intellectual and political momentum within Manila's elite networks.

At this juncture, the composition and orientation of the Sociedad (Figure 2) underwent a transformation. While the Sociedad in its original form had prioritized agrarian reform and commercial productivity, its 1819 reorganization took place within the political landscape of Bourbon reformism and the reassertion of imperial authority following the Napoleonic Wars. In response to these changes, the Sociedad expanded its focus to promote the arts and sciences, aligning with broader imperial goals that linked technical education and aesthetic refinement.

Notably, alongside the founding of the Academia, the Sociedad also established the Escuela Náutica de Manila in 1820, which scholars have recognized as a cornerstone of scientific education in the colony (Aguilar and Ay-ad 2022). The school trained aspiring mariners to staff the ships that sustained global trade. Within this renewed framework for scientific and technical instruction, the Sociedad endorsed the creation of the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura and appointed Domingo as professor in 1823 and the Academia's director in 1827.

The founding of the Academia was not merely a revival of a dormant eighteenth-century initiative; it was the realization of a new reformist vision in the 1820s—one that saw visual instruction as a means of cultivating discipline, aesthetic taste and social distinction.

In the 1820s, the Sociedad continued to prioritize economic policies favourable to elite business interests. Members included prominent expatriate merchants such as Carl Johann Karuth

(“Mr. Karut”) and Raphael Daniel Baboom (“Sr. Superintendente del Jardín Botánico de Calcuta”), both involved in the textile industry and commissioners of tipos del país albums (de Mas y Otzet 1877, p. 28; Santiago 1990, pp. 118–21).

Moreover, a cursory look at the Sociedad’s diverse 1821 membership reveals how the Academia emerged from reformist

CUADRO GENERAL		
<i>de los Sres. Sócios que han ingresado en la Real Sociedad Económica Filipina de Amigos del País desde su restablecimiento que tuvo lugar el 17 de enero de 1820.</i>		
Año.	NOMBRE.	Clase.
1819	M. I.º Sr. D. Mariano F. de Folgueras	Número.
»	Sr. D. Francisco Bayot	»
»	» » Esteban Ballesteros. . . .	»
»	» Conde de Avilés.	»
»	» D. José Irureta Goyena . . .	»
»	» » Ventura de los Reyes. . .	»
»	» » Simon Fernandez	»
1820	Ilmo. Sr. Fr. Juan Ant.º Zulaibar.	»
»	» » » Nicolás M. y Cayecedo	»
»	Sr. D. José Joaquin Ponce. . .	»
»	» » Manuel Bernaldez. . . .	»
»	» » Ildefonso Aragon.	»
»	» » Rufino Suarez	»
»	» » Manuel Fuertes	»
»	» » Martín Salaveria.	»
»	» » José Nicolás Irastorza . .	»
»	» » Luis Rodríguez Varela . .	»
»	» » Alejandro Parreño	»
»	» » Pedro Leon de Rotaache . .	»
»	» » Raymundo Mijares.	»
»	» » José Fernandez	»
»	Fr. José Collado	»
»	» Manuel Royo	»
»	» Hilarion Diez	»
»	» Nicolás Becerra	»
»	» José Aldana	»

FIGURE 2 First page of the membership roll of the Sociedad (Source: de Mas Y Otzet 1877)

networks. Notable figures included Ildefonso Aragon, chief engineer of Manila, who collaborated with Ambrosio Casas—father-in-law of Domingo—in erecting the statue of King Carlos IV in Intramuros (1811–25). Aragon also authored studies on the colony's geography and economy and planned military fortifications (Luengo 2009, pp. 65–78; Pardo de Tavera 1903, pp. 28–30). The Sociedad's members were politically diverse: Archbishop Juan Antonio Zulaibar, initially opposed to secularization, gradually adopted more liberal views (Anduaga 2019, vol. 3, pp. 159–60; vol. 4, pp. 208–209). Among the progressive clergy was Fr. Manuel Blanco, Augustinian botanist and co-author of *Flora de Filipinas* (1877), who employed Academia alumni as scientific illustrators.

The Sociedad also admitted criollo liberals such as Francisco Bayot and Íñigo González de Azaola, both involved in uprisings against Peninsular dominance in the 1820s and 1840s (Nolasco 1970, pp. 109–10). José Ortega, a commissioner overseeing the liquidation of the Real Compañía de Filipinas, was imprisoned for sedition after the 1823 Novales mutiny. Similarly, José de Azcárraga y Ugarte, a Peninsular bookseller, advocated for Philippine representation in the Spanish Cortes (Anduaga 2022, p. 391). Other members, like Luis Rodríguez Valera and José María Jugo, were exiled for alleged *filibusterismo* (subversion) in 1823 (de Llobet 2011, pp. 267–84).¹²

One of Damián Domingo's patrons, Domingo Roxas (1782–1843), was an exemplar of the liberal elite membership. Founder of Casa Roxas (the precursor to Ayala Corporation), Roxas was an avid collector of art and scientific specimens (Arenas 1850, p. 39).¹³ Despite his influence, he was imprisoned for suspected support of both the 1823 Novales revolt and the 1841 uprising led by Hermano Pule (Joaquin 1990, p. 89).

Beyond their involvement in colonial uprisings, Sociedad members formed an active intellectual network. Upon the Sociedad's revival in 1819, it recovered 2,587 books from its dissolved 1797 collection—mainly texts on craftsmanship and Spanish grammar (Hernandez 1996, p. 137; Hill 2015, p. 225)—and by 1820, artistic discussions featured in its agenda (Anduaga 2022, p. 387). It also published the

Registro Mercantil de Manila (1824), ran the colony's first paper mill (by 1825)¹⁴ and established a museum to house the toppled statue of Queen Isabella II (Torres 2005, pp. 35–42).

The Sociedad's agrarian reform strategies, which promoted modern farming and model estates (Díaz-Trechuelo 1966, p. 110), were applied to artisanal industries. In 1824, the Sociedad offered prizes for textile weaving and dyeing, and it funded the study of Indian *cambaya* fabric techniques by eight artists (Blair and Robertson 1903, p. 35).

The founding of the Academia can be treated as both a response to a groundswell of support from local artists and part of a broader imperial initiative. Coinciding with Domingo's opening of his house as an art school in 1821, the Spanish Cortes had proposed a comprehensive educational reform that included the establishment of art schools in the colonies (Corpuz 1997, pp. 81–100; Simpson 1980, pp. 8–10). The Sociedad's promotion of technical education reflected both these metropolitan currents and the aspirations of Manila's reformist elite.

Domingo's career was shaped by these dynamic currents. As a *mestizo chino* from a Catholic merchant family, he benefited from the upward mobility made possible by commerce and the Sociedad's liberal outlook, though always within the limits imposed by colonial policy and prevalent racial hierarchies.

The Emergence of the Academia

Domingo was likely the sole instructor of the Academia at its inception, operating it alongside his atelier. But he was not alone in his aspiration to formalize art education. As early as 1785, visual arts were being taught at the University of Santo Tomás (UST), where Fray Juan Amador observed that a few skilled priests took on this role of educators (Clark 2021, pp. 56, 88; Bazaco 1953, p. 42). Drawing instructors in Manila also included Peninsulares, criollos, and likely mestizos. A 1734 census noted that some 380 Chinese-mestizo families were engaged in painting, sculpture, carpentry and smithing (Clark 2021, p. 56).

The rise of art academies can be seen as a response to a design crisis in nineteenth-century Europe, where industrialization eroded the role of skilled artisans. Guild systems declined as factories replaced workshops, and long apprenticeships gave way to unskilled labour (Pevsner 1940, p. 112, 17–128; Saumarez Smith 1993, pp. 49, 154). A similar crisis unfolded in Manila during the mid-eighteenth century, exacerbated by periodic expulsions of Chinese craftsmen. Though rich in natural resources, products from the Philippines were seen as artistically inferior to those from rivals like Canton and Calcutta (Scott 2015, pp. 23–25).

Reformist interpretations of the economic crisis in the late eighteenth century shaped the agenda of the Sociedad, which prioritized agricultural improvement, industry and the systematic study of natural resources over the founding of an art school *per se*. In this context, botanical expeditions and print culture established drawing and illustration as practical instruments of scientific classification, imperial coordination and economic reform, a logic that later informed the preference for applied instruction in drawing and design under Sociedad patronage (Díaz-Trechuelo 1997, pp. 15–34; Bleichmar 2007, pp. 129–31).¹⁵ That same year, the tobacco monopoly was established, requiring skilled labour for attractive product packaging. Tobacco was processed mainly in Binondo, a hub for Chinese-mestizo labour (de Viana 2001, pp. 115–20).

The founding of the Sociedad coincided with a broader Enlightenment-era interest in the scientific and economic potential of Spain's colonies. This vision demanded visual documentation: Juan de Cuéllar, royal botanist sent to the Philippines in 1786, not only collected flora but also established a laboratory and hired local draftsmen to illustrate specimens (Madulid 1997, p. 145). Their work showed how drawing could serve the textile industry and pharmaceutical science by enabling classification, cataloguing and commodification of resources (Cruz Gutierrez 2025, pp. 10, 12, 16; Mojares 2023, pp. 81–84, 129, 232).

Art and commerce became increasingly intertwined. The Sociedad's support for art education mirrored Enlightenment Academism and

challenged the dominance of sectarian and guild-based models. Until the 1820s, mestizo artists remained confined to medieval-style apprenticeships, which limited social mobility (Flores 1998, p. 207; Joaquin 1990, pp. 14–15). The Sociedad's engagement with Cuéllar's draftsmen foreshadowed its later support for Domingo's project, which envisioned the artist not as a manual labourer but as a civil servant of public, secular culture.

One of Domingo's most successful students, Justiniano Asuncion (1816–96), eventually became capitan municipal of Santa Cruz, Manila, in 1853, underscoring the rising civic stature of artists (Clark 2015, p. 5). The Academia's output included religious imagery, commercial illustration and touristic art. Artworks were valued as tools of taste formation and circulated through merchant networks, elevating artistic labour and extending its reach beyond the classroom (Capistrano-Baker 2014, pp. 259–61; 2017, pp. 237–38). Miniature ivory portraits, often gifted to colonial officials, embodied this shift to professionalized art.

The partial liberalization of trade in 1785 opened the Philippines to American merchants, increasing demand for secular art and stimulating Manila's cash economy. That year, King Carlos III reduced Church control over painting, allowing artists to reach a broader clientele and develop secular genres (Cushner 1971, p. 210; Schumacher 1987, pp. 47–48). Export crop surpluses created a new intelligentsia—merchants and landowners—who became patrons of the arts (Corpuz 1997, p. 268). These changes reflected Enlightenment ideals articulated in Campomanes's *Discurso sobre la educación popular de los artesanos* (1775), which called for artisan training in drawing, math and the establishment of trade academies to spur national productivity.

By 1781, plans for trade and art schools were already under way (Sallana 1910, p. 104), and Governor General Rafael María Aguilar proposed a formal Academy of Drawing by 1796, arguing that skilled Filipino artisans could rival European artists (Díaz Pascual 2019a). Despite reforms at institutions like UST—where the printing press and library were expanded—colonial authorities like Basco y Vargas

criticized the university system as “medieval”, stalling Enlightenment reforms amid unrest and epidemics (Corpuz 1997, pp. 122–24; Villaroel 2012, pp. 211–13; de La Gironière 1854, pp. 45–46).¹⁶

Before 1821, artistic patronage in the Philippines remained largely under the sway of the Catholic Church. The gradual secularization of support for artists coincided with Manila’s increasing openness as a port, which introduced foreign travellers as new patrons and enabled the growth of a prosperous Chinese-mestizo merchant class. It was within this changing environment that Domingo rose to prominence as a portraitist (Scott 2015, p. 22).

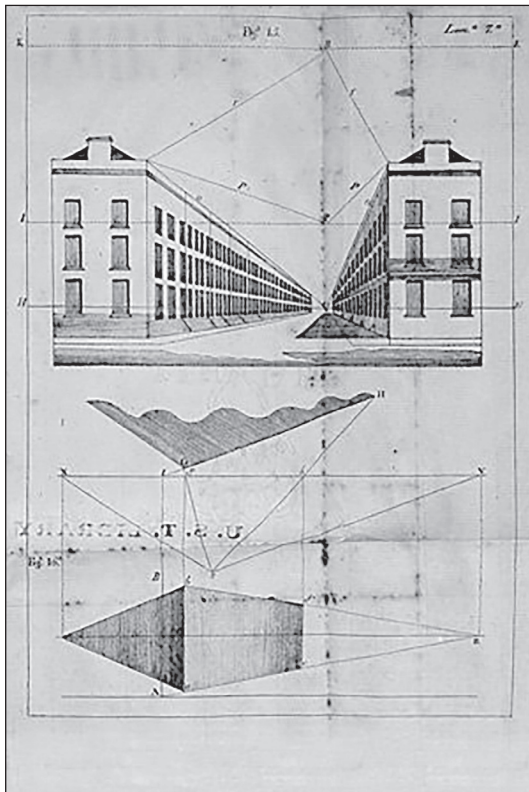


FIGURE 3 A page of illustrations from the *Elementos de Perspectiva* (Source: Marcelino 2018)

Domingo's pedagogy marked a break from religious instruction, emphasizing secular training in still life, anatomy, perspective, oil and watercolour painting, and decorative techniques (Bazaco 1953, p. 148). His *tipos del país* series, widely copied by students and exported to Canton, illustrated his influence on artistic production (Santiago 1990; Capistrano-Baker 2004). The 1828 textbook *Elementos de Perspectiva* (Figure 3), attributed to Domingo and prepared for the Academia, reflects an academic emphasis on draftsmanship. The captions of the plates seem to suggest that the images were drawn from familiar architectural forms in Intramuros to instruct students in linear perspective and spatial construction. Close comparison, however, shows that Domingo relied heavily on British drawing manuals, most notably the extensively illustrated atlas published by R. Ackermann in London in 1821 (Ackermann 1821, p. 88). In several instances, examples in *Elementos de Perspectiva* were taken directly from this British source, with certain plates reproduced in their entirety. This incorporation of British instructional imagery reflects the commercial and intellectual trade flows of the 1820s, through which printed manuals and pedagogical models were circulated into Manila alongside commodities and technical knowledge.¹⁷

Students painted on various materials—ivory, metal, wood, canvas—requiring advanced technical knowledge. Their influences included scientific illustrations and expeditionary images from figures like Cuéllar and Brambila (Mojares 2023, pp. 81–84). While secular art gained ground, religious commissions remained significant, to the extent that the Academia may have influenced ecclesiastical aesthetics (Quirino 1961, p. 860; Flores 1998, pp. 207–25). In its earliest iteration, the Academia does not appear to have been shaped decisively by the baroque religious and royal compositions that would later dominate its curriculum. Although such Iberian works—by painters like Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Jusepe de Ribera, Alonso Cano Almansa and Guido Reni—eventually became central models for academic training, Concha Díaz Pascual (2019b) suggests that this baroque repertoire reflects a later imposition of metropolitan expectations rather than the school's initial orientation. Cruz

Gutierrez (2025, pp. 63–64) similarly notes that the predominance of baroque exemplars in Manila was a subsequent development, rather than a defining feature of the institution's founding phase. For Chinese-mestizo students, admission to the Academia provided a rare avenue for cultural legitimacy.¹⁸ The Academia codified and disciplined local artistic labour, incorporating sangley workshop traditions into academic frameworks (Arenas 1850, Zaragoza 1884; Mitchell 1991, pp. 34–59). Drawing became a tool of imperial discipline, aligning visual production with Enlightenment ideals. The liberal ideas sweeping Peninsular Spain also brought in French models of academies that bridged fine arts and crafts. Rather than an act of racial idealism, the institution's inclusive policies reflected the Sociedad's economic reformist agenda and echoes of the 1812 Cádiz Constitution's egalitarianism (Pérez 2020, p. 30), which was drafted by representatives from Spanish possessions, including the Philippines. Yet, even as these ideals were beginning to take root, they remained limited by entrenched colonial hierarchies and unequal access to resources (Legarda 2009, p. 361). According to Zaragoza (1884), the Academia's students mostly came from elite families even if the Academia opened its doors to anyone, and art supplies provided were funded by the Sociedad.¹⁹ It is worth noting too that women were not yet admitted into the Academia. While no explicit male-only policy was codified in the surviving documents, the absence of women within its student body suggests that structural and social barriers effectively excluded them from participation in formal artistic training at this stage.

The Sociedad inaugurated the Academia on 2 December 1823, after petitioning Governor Juan Antonio Martínez Alcobendas to establish a drawing academy (Díaz Pascual 2019a). Since Domingo was paid 300 pesos monthly, which covered both his teaching and the use of his home, most art historians believe that the Academia simply absorbed the painting and drawing school he had already established. Domingo's 1827 contract as head of the Academia, which stipulated that "all who present themselves for admission shall be enrolled, whether Spaniards, mestizos, or indios", reflected the institution's

inclusive vision rather than the prevailing racial politics. This openness was striking in light of the racial exclusions still enforced by other schools in Manila. The Escuela Náutica, for instance, maintained a policy of restricting admission by ethnicity—a stance that provoked criticism, particularly since institutions like San Juan de Letrán (which began accepting indio students as early as 1640) and the UST (which enrolled Chinese and some Spanish mestizos by the eighteenth century) had already admitted non-Spaniards (Manlapaz 1953, p. 36; Villarroel 2012, pp. 240–45; Aguilar and Ay-Ad 2021, p. 122). Comparable restrictions were in place at the Escuela Pía when it opened in 1817 and later at the Escuela de Comercio in 1839. Pressured by the Consulado—the influential mercantile court—the nautical school barred indios and mestizos, a regulation censured by newspapers as early as 1821 (Alzona 1932, p. 62). Against this backdrop, the Academia’s explicit policy of racial equality stood out as strikingly ahead of its time.

These foundational documents and early reports show that, while the Academia was indeed the product of Domingo’s prestige and artistic enterprise, his goals and the institutional identity of the Academia were shaped by the civic and reformist ambitions of the Sociedad, which sought to embed art within the broader project of social amelioration.

Like the Academia’s visual production, the racial liberalism of the Academia reflects a creolized strain of European Enlightenment. As outlined earlier, the Sociedad explicitly stipulated that Spaniards, mestizos and indios be treated equally in Domingo’s school (Clark 2014, p. 67). At the same time, the Articles of Incorporation of the Compañía, whose members revived the Sociedad in 1819, likewise prohibited racial discrimination, echoing the ethos of the 1812 Cádiz Constitution, whose promise of racial equality resonated widely in the colonies (Pérez 2020, p. 29).

Retaña ([1906] 1964, pp. 557, 678) and Quirino (1961, p. 83) have established that it was Domingo’s prestige as a portrait painter, despite being a mestizo, that led to his appointment as professor of painting in 1823. In 1850, journalist Rafael Diaz Arenas recalled the

manner in which students were assessed and credentialed: “already in 1828, I have witnessed public examinations (in the Academy) presided over by a commission of the Sociedad composed of four individuals and its secretary” (Quirino 1961, p. 88). Governor General Ricafort’s visits further raised the public character of the school (Clotet 1992). Enrolment remained steady until Domingo’s passing in 1834.

The centrality of Domingo’s role in the establishment of the Academia can be traced to Miguel Zaragoza, an ilustrado writer and painter whose biographical project explicitly privileged the works of native Filipinos. Zaragoza’s account, however, tended to magnify Domingo’s individual agency, leading to the late nineteenth-century habit of referring to the institution as the Escuela de Damián Domingo (Flores 1998, p. 205; Santiago 1991, p. 271). Relying primarily on Zaragoza, both Flores and Santiago questioned whether the Academia was truly an academy in the European sense, suggesting it functioned more as a private atelier, with its naming reflecting Domingo’s stature rather than structural equivalence. Yet, when the foundational documents of the Sociedad are weighed against journalistic accounts, its institutional imprint on the Academia appears to be as important as the individual actions of Domingo.

The Sociedad’s formal offer in 1827 to appoint Domingo as director affirms both his reputation and the progressive ethos of the institution. That the Sociedad extended the directorship to a Chinese mestizo rather than a Peninsular Spaniard was a striking departure from prevailing racial norms. The appointment letter testifies to the esteem in which Domingo was held and to the Sociedad’s reformist vision. However, this moment proved exceptional: in subsequent decades, the Academia’s leadership reverted to Peninsulares, with instruction disrupted whenever they were recalled or retired.

Another way to understand the interaction between Domingo and the Sociedad is through Arenas’s (1850) claim that the school closed following Domingo’s death, whereas the official explanation pointed to a lack of funds (Retaña [1906] 1964, p. 678; Quirino 1961, p. 85). The Sociedad failed to provide enough subsidy to

sustain the institution, and Domingo's absence, due to his poor health and the broader economic shift brought about by the end of the Real Compañía de Filipinas' trade monopoly, probably reduced public interest in the school. The company's dissolution in 1834 marked the end of the commercial order that had helped support such cultural initiatives.

For the next two decades, Manila lacked a comparable figure to helm the Academy. In 1849, the Sociedad, backed by royal patronage, relaunched the school, modelling it after Madrid's Real Academia de San Fernando. Three Spanish professors—Manuel de la Cortina, Enrique Nieto and Nicolás Valdez—were appointed to introduce academic techniques to local artists (Fernández 1877, p. 297). They remained until around 1860, succeeded by Agustín Sáez, who led the school until his death in 1891.

A testament to the persistence of values nurtured in the 1820s, the Academia, upon its re-establishment in 1849, aligned more explicitly with Enlightenment ideals of utility and scientific integration, collaborating with the Botanical Garden (founded 1858) and the UST's Gabinete de la Física (established 1871) to fold drawing into colonial scientific and bureaucratic practice (Cruz Gutierrez 2025, pp. 114–17). Equally consequential was the gradual participation of women artists. Sculptor Pelagia Mendoza (1867–1939) and painter Carmen Zaragoza (1876–1943) were admitted to the Academia in 1889.²⁰ News of both artists receiving medals in 1892 was widely reported in the Philippine press, though their award-winning works are now presumed lost. Parallel to this, Emma Vidal (1855–?) contributed a botanical plate to Fr. Manuel Blanco's *Flora de Filipinas* in 1877. Sisters Paz Paterno (1867–1914) and Adelaida Paterno (1880–1962) produced masterly oil paintings (notably still lifes), with Adelaida also experimenting with embroideries using human hair (Hernandez 2004, pp. 78–130). Taken together, the admission of women illustrates how the Academia's Enlightenment programme originating in the 1820s broadened access while sustaining the activities of artists criss-crossing the porous boundaries between genres of fine arts and design.

In 1891, a royal decree merged the Academia into the Escuela de Artes y Oficios, a technical school. Reflecting the development of art appreciation in Manila, this move was met with protest from later members of the Sociedad, particularly Jacobo Zóbel, who, citing Kantian aesthetics, argued against equating “painting portraits and landscapes” with “painting houses” or practising carpentry (Sallana 1910, p. 104; Quirino 1967, pp. 348–53). His objections were ultimately overruled.

By the end of the century, both the Academia and the Sociedad had grown increasingly dependent on public funds, leaving them susceptible to political shifts. This vulnerability, along with the rise of revolutionary sentiment by 1872, marked their waning influence. A symbolic blow came earlier: in the aftermath of the 1880 earthquake, Domingo’s house on Calle Real de Tondo—once the original site of the Academia—was destroyed (Zaragoza 1884, pp. 122–23).

The Academia and Artistic Labour

What is known of Domingo’s physical appearance comes from a miniature painted on an ivory sheet in 1826, which is also the oldest known self-portrait made in the Philippines (Figure 4). In the miniature, Domingo presents his distinct Chinese-mestizo features (Santiago 2000, p. 83). He is dressed in the uniform of a Spanish navy ensign. The portrait, once thought lost, was later rediscovered during an audit of the Luis Araneta Collection, where it had been carefully framed inside an ostrich egg, wrapped in gold and mother of pearl, and mounted on silver with pelagic motifs.

While previous catalogues described the miniature as painted in oil, close comparison with hatching techniques characteristic of ivory watercolours, as seen in Domingo’s *tipos del país*, suggests that the portrait was likely executed in watercolour. His other portraits on ivory were also done in watercolour. This material observation is crucial because it connects Domingo’s work to the global circulation of miniatures as a mobile artistic form—especially in transoceanic trading ports such as New England and those along the South

China Sea (Johnston and Frank 2014, p. 82; Capistrano-Baker and Priyadarshini 2020, p. 247).

The self-portrait also sheds light on the changing nature of artistic labour in 1820s Manila and how artists historically negotiated their status in relation to other forms of work. The emergence of the notion



FIGURE 4 Damián Domingo, self-portrait, gouache on oval-shaped ivory sheet, 6.1 cm x 4.8 cm, 1826 (Source: Ayala Museum)

of “artistic genius” in the mid-seventeenth century transformed this perception, elevating painting from a manual craft to an intellectual pursuit (Alpers 1990, p. 9). Self-portraiture became a potent tool in this transformation, allowing artists to display both their likeness and their virtuosity. From Judith Leyster’s and Adélaïde Labille-Guiard’s meticulous renderings of fabric and texture (Broude and Garrard 1995, p. 75) to Gustave Courbet’s theatrical self-images (Nochlin 1976, p. 15), artists used their own faces and hands to assert their creative authority and claim a place above the ranks of ordinary labourers.

As the watercolour miniature self-portrait was a practice cultivated in entrepôts around the world, Domingo’s self-portrait operated within this tradition, projecting his mastery of academic techniques while marking a deliberate distance from craftwork. Painted while he was already a maestro in the Academia, his self-portrait serves not only as a record of his appearance but also as a declaration of his professional and social status—both as a trained artist and through his family ties. It presents a visual argument for the intellectual and skilled nature of his work in a colonial society, where such recognition was far from guaranteed (Quirino 1990, pp. 33–34).

Through his ties to reformist figures like Luis Varela—also known as “El Conde Filipino”, a prominent creole intellectual and Sociedad member—Domingo likely saw himself as a local nobleman: Catholic, loyal to the Crown, and aligned with Enlightenment ideals (Santiago 2000, p. 80; de Llobet 2018, pp. 131–54). His self-portrait affirms this self-conception. Both Varela and Domingo embodied a strand of the Hispanic Enlightenment associated with the rise of the sociedades across the Spanish world—an Enlightenment that pursued progress not by displacing religious authority, but by reforming society through the mutual reinforcement of monarchy and church through civic institutions. Within this somewhat divergent strain from the French anti-Catholic Enlightenment, state service, artistic labour and moral conduct were conceived as interdependent facets of enlightened citizenship.

This alignment of civic reform and artistic practice found expression in Domingo’s *tipos del país* series, which captured the



FIGURE 5 Damián Domingo, *Colección de trajes de Manila* [Manila Costume Collection], 1827–32 (2 of 29), watercolour, 42 x 27 cm (Source: Newberry Library)

shifting dynamics of race, class and identity in early nineteenth-century Manila. Adapted from a genre that arrived from Canton in the 1790s, the *tipos* genre flourished in Domingo's hands and through the work of his students at the Academia (Clark 2018, p. 49). A watercolour album at the Newberry Library (Figure 5) includes two figures labelled in Spanish and English as mestizo residents of the city—a man in a top hat, embroidered *piña* barong and striped trousers, and a woman wearing a white blouse and veil, *piña* lacework and a patterned scarf. These markers of elite attire mirror the identity of the genre's creators, who were themselves mestizo.

The *tipos* subtly encoded shifting colonial hierarchies of trade and race. Each image portrays figures in routine activity, embedding their roles within the social order. For the civic elite, *tipos* became a visual strategy to assert class identity in a city reshaped by rising American commerce (Capistrano-Baker and Castro 2022, pp. 36–41).

The genre's popularity reflects how Manila's emergent middle class embraced portraiture as a form of self-fashioning. This visual practice gestured towards the dual meaning of *ilustrado* in the late nineteenth century—both “enlightened” and “illustrated”—and staged a claim to national belonging by depicting social types as part of a shared civic world, *del país*.²¹

Domingo's tipos del país were commissioned in 1827 by Rafael Daniel Baboom, an Armenian cloth merchant from Madras, and prominently featured the textiles he sold (Canta 2020, p. 99). Executed with Chinese sable brushes, each figure showcases intricate fabrics and nuanced expressions. Rumoured to include portraits of Domingo's own family, these works embedded his community within colonial visual culture (Quirino 1961, p. 81; Ongpin 1983, p. 32).

The evolving visual language of the tipos del país can be traced in the work of José Honorato Lozano, an alumnus of the Academia whose practice both continued and transformed the genre. His visual idiom drew on scientific illustration and travel literature, reflecting the broader intellectual milieu in which the Academia was situated in its first decade. By the early 1830s, Lozano had enrolled under Domingo, beginning a career that would carry forward and reshape the pictorial conventions of his teacher. Where Domingo's tipos presented frontal figures against plain backgrounds, Lozano embedded his subjects within elaborate landscapes, costumes, inscriptions and scenes of everyday life that reflected the textures of nineteenth-century Manila.

In compositions such as *Emilio Pérez del Pulgar* (Figure 6), human figures—mestizos, vendors, students and servants—form the patron's name amid a harbour setting rendered with architectural precision. These hybrid works, called *letras y figuras*, combine portraiture, genre painting and civic typology. Their formal ambition reflects the pedagogical rigour of the Academia, where students learned outline drawing, perspective, anatomy and compositional design. Yet their vernacular energy transforms imperial visual conventions into localized expression. Like Domingo's tipos, Lozano's works encoded emergent identities and social hierarchies, but with his

layering of spatial detail and narrative context, the genre shifted from ethnographic typology to a textured vernacular.

Debates over whether Domingo's institution qualifies as an Academia often miss the intellectual ambitions of the Academia and the Sociedad because, unlike present-day fine arts academies with fixed curricula and degree programmes, Domingo's school retained aspects of the guild system by providing an open-ended space for



FIGURE 6 José Honorato Lozano (1821–85), *Emilio Perez del Pulgar* (ca. 1840). Watercolour on paper, 67 × 69 cm, signed lower right (Source: Leon Gallery, Manila)

training and production. The school was a platform for taste making, credentialing and professionalization, as it accepted commissions, exhibited students' works and even undertook government projects, prompting Flores (1998, p. 227) to remark that the school was “practically part of ‘public works’”. But given the definition of what an Academia was during the Bourbon reform era, it is precisely this civic function that marks it as an Academia.

The Academia also served as a mechanism for converting artistic skill into symbolic capital. By institutionalizing drawing instruction and aligning it with European aesthetic norms, it elevated certain forms of visual knowledge as markers of civility and distinction. For Chinese-mestizo artisans, enrolment offered not only technical training but also access to a social field where artistic excellence conferred legitimacy and proximity to power. In this way, the Academia functioned as a site of cultural reproduction, transforming visual labour into a regulated pathway for upward mobility (Bourdieu 1996, pp. 6–12). Rather than accepting Quirino's conjecture that Domingo introduced the principle of racial equality into the Academy's founding documents, the institution's creation is better understood—based on clear documentary evidence—as the Sociedad's institutional response to overlapping reformist goals: to develop a trained class of draftsmen, artisans and artists equipped to contribute to the visual and material reordering of colonial society.

Conclusion

The founding of the Academia in early nineteenth-century Manila was a pivotal moment in the history of Philippine art and education. It represented the convergence of Enlightenment ideals, economic liberalism and social reform, propagated by the Sociedad. As the first secular institution for artistic instruction in Asia, the Academia became instrumental in the professionalization of Filipino artists, positioning art as both a civic and intellectual endeavour. The Sociedad fostered the growth of a creative class and elevated art beyond its religious and traditional confines.

Domingo's leadership, shaped by his mestizo heritage, epitomized the complex social dynamics of the time. His contributions, especially through his involvement in the *tipos del país* genre, reshaped Manila's artistic landscape, bridging local and global art forms. Influenced by currents from metropolitan Spain, the school's curriculum integrated artistic instruction with civic ideals. This demonstrated how Enlightenment thought took root in Manila, shaping not only art but broader social reforms.

The establishment of the Academia reflects a broader trend of intellectual and social transformation in the colony, contributing to the long-term evolution of Filipino cultural identity. By professionalizing artists and expanding art into secular spaces, the Academia facilitated a shift in how Filipinos engaged with art and society.

Reframing the history of the Academia away from hagiographical accounts of individual artists and towards understanding it as the result of a convergence of material and intellectual exchange reveals the parallel transmission of techniques and ideological frameworks. Through projects like the Academia, the Sociedad generated networks for skills dissemination attuned to the entanglements of colonial power dynamics and metropolitan resistance to change. These institutions collectively participated in the worlding of Enlightenment ideas in early nineteenth-century Manila. The Academia honed the skills of artists, who later became studio practitioners and civil servants, as it pushed for racial equality, offering an alternative to the friar-dominated educational system. It supported the idea that art could transcend church-prescribed subjects, reflecting an ideological shift towards a more humanist approach to education, albeit still relying on royal patronage and mercantile interest, along with civic backing, for its survival.

While the distillation of Enlightenment thought within the Sociedad did not immediately produce a fully formed Filipino political identity, sparks of reform emerged, especially among mestizo communities. The Sociedad welcomed members with diverse political views, from royalists to reformists. Economic liberalism was espoused by individuals with varying degrees of loyalty to the

Spanish Crown, reflecting the complex political landscape of the time. The convergence of members of varied political persuasions in matters concerning the Academia helped the Sociedad become a key circuit of intellectual exchange, resulting in the democratization and professionalization of the arts. By fostering a creative class, the Sociedad and Academia laid the groundwork for the eventual participation of artists as cultural workers in the revolutionary movement of the late 1890s.

There is a striking tension in Domingo's early twentieth-century recognition as the *Primer Pintor Filipino*²² (*Enciclopedia universal ilustrada* 1907, p. 351), given that his renown rests largely on the *tipos del país*—a genre that, while innovative, visually codified colonial social hierarchies and racial typologies. Yet the broader narrative of the Academia he founded complicates this view: It was a site where racial barriers were formally challenged, and where the category of the professional Filipino artist began to emerge as a vehicle for civic participation and social reform.

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NOTES

1. The digitized materials consulted for this study were accessed through major Spanish and Philippine archival portals, including the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica (Biblioteca Nacional de España); PARES (Portal of Spanish Archives, Ministry of Culture, Spain); the Archivo General de Indias via PARES; the Archivo Histórico Nacional via PARES; the National

- Archives of the Philippines digital collections; the Miguel de Benavides Library (University of Santo Tomas); the Antonio Vivencio del Rosario UST Heritage Library; and the Newberry Library in Chicago.
2. Here, “recent economic history” refers to works published after the last known dedicated study on Domingo (Santiago 2010) that reassess the economic and institutional transformations of late Spanish colonial Manila, particularly in light of available archival material and digitization projects. Efforts in the last decade to study the founding of colonial-era art academies in Latin America have been similarly spurred by the digitization of archival records.
 3. Flores (1998, pp. 205–9) provided an overview of the Academia’s sense of art making as artistic labour. All quotations from Spanish sources have been translated into English by the author.
 4. See Diaz-Trechuelo (1965; 1966; 2003) for a dedicated study of the Real Compañía and Legarda (2009) for a later discussion of the confluence of the Sociedad and the Compañía. The earliest study of economic development that mentions the Sociedad and Compañía was by Benitez and Craig (1916).
 5. A decree in 1789 expanded the company’s privileges by repealing the prohibitions on importing oriental cloths and permitting Manila merchants to trade with other Asian ports. It further exempted Philippine products from duties in both Manila and Spain and authorized Chinese merchants to trade freely in the capital.
 6. As the Sociedad was referred to in Domingo’s *tipos del pais* albums (1827–32).
 7. Mercado denotes a general public market for everyday goods. Parián refers to a regulated commercial quarter that was commonly associated with Chinese merchants in the Philippines and functioned as both an economic centre and a site of colonial surveillance. *Alcaicería*, derived from the Arabic *al-qaysariyya*, designates an enclosed or controlled market specializing in luxury goods and operating under crown regulation. These terms thus describe different commercial spaces.
 8. It was modelled in part on its predecessor, the Alcaicería de San Fernando, located across the Pasig River.
 9. There is no documentary evidence to support the specific birth date of 12 February 1796 for Domingo given in most biographies. His exact birth date remains uncertain, but it is estimated that he was about thirty-five to forty years old at the time of his death in 1834.
 10. The official appointment of Ambrosio Casas as captain of the Prince’s Militia Regiment in 1795 is mentioned in the Simancas Archive (*Ambrosio Casas* 1795). Another file, kept in the Philippine section of the Archivo

Histórico Nacional, Ultramar, box 528, decrees that Don Ambrosio Casas should be “granted the grace to enjoy the same privileges as the Spanish in those Islands”.

11. While trade with North America provided temporary relief, Spanish merchants in the colonial metropolis pushed for trade barriers. Pioneering efforts in establishing the agricultural industry were rewarded with the shipment of the colony's first export crops along with the imposition of a lucrative tobacco monopoly from 1782 to 1832 (de Jesus 1980, p. 10; Pelzer 1974, p. 153).
12. The Sociedad accepted loyal Peninsulares too like the first Compañía director, Manuel Bernáldez.
13. Roxas was born in San Miguel, Manila, and may have descended from Antonio Fernandez de Roxas, a galleon pilot from Acapulco. His physical likeness has been captured in a miniature portrait on ivory painted by Domingo.
14. Later, the Sociedad also produced the *Revista Filipinas de Ciencia y Artes* (Journal of Arts and Sciences), in 1881.
15. On the bibliographic and visual infrastructure that underpinned Bourbon botanical science, see Calatayud (1984), especially items no. 7 and no. 487, which reproduce Casimiro Gómez Ortega's (1776; 1788) official book lists for royal botanists. The second list is transcribed in Engstrand (1992, appendix A, pp. 186–87).
16. Basco was referring to the presence of the Commissaries of the Inquisition inside UST.
17. See Luengo (2020, pp. 63–70) for a visual comparison of structures in *Elementos de Perspectiva* with the examples in *Bahay na Bato*; see Efland (1983) for an overview of academic pedagogical traditions.
18. See Bourdieu (1992), Zolberg (1990) and Menger (1999) for the concept of legitimacy in the context of cultural production.
19. The Sociedad instructed Domingo to attend to the “economic” use of paper and pencils.
20. This was preceded by the exhibition *Una Mestiza* by criollo artist Granada Cabezudo Cristobal (1865–c.1900) in Madrid in 1887—now in the Prado. This is likely the only nineteenth-century work by a Southeast Asian woman exhibited in Europe.
21. For more discussions of tipos del país, see Mojares (2023, pp. 265–81), Cariño and Ner (2004), Joaquin and Santiago (1990), and Ongpin (1983).
22. “Primer Pinto Filipino” (First Filipino Painter) is an erroneous transcription in later publications. In Zaragoza's 1884 profile, Domingo was more specifically dubbed “Primer Profesor de Pintura” (First Professor of Painting).

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