

The Point

by Saverio Mancina

Joeey P. Mánlapaz could be in your neighborhood right now. You probably wouldn't notice her, but a few months later you might recognize your house or your store window in one of her paintings.

Mánlapaz is an artist whose work captures the dignity and style of Washington's oldest neighborhoods. No small task, but with her eye for architectural detail and a palette of subdued, tropical colors, the buildings which demand her attention are transformed.

Concrete cubes with windows are of no interest to her. Federal and Victorian style buildings with prominent cornices, whimsical window frames, and rich brickwork catch her eye.

Mánlapaz's work is a reflection of her personality. The buildings which attract her interest appear on canvas as very insular yet inviting, proud yet also very warm. Rarely are there people in her paintings. Mánlapaz's interest is the life the buildings breathe into the city.

Mánlapaz is discouraged by the fact that many of the buildings in the neighborhoods where she has painted — including Shaw, Anacostia, Georgetown, Adams-Morgan and Capitol Hill — have been abandoned or demolished. If these neighborhoods cannot be returned to their former grandeur, then at least they can be transformed with the paintbrush.

Sitting in her studio surrounded by paintings which will be on exhibit this month at the University Club, Mánlapaz talks about the Washington she moved to in 1970. While she loved architecture of her native Manila, she grew to appreciate the distinct style of Washington neighborhoods. "The heritage of any city," Mánlapaz quietly explains, "is contained in its buildings."

A disciplined upbringing

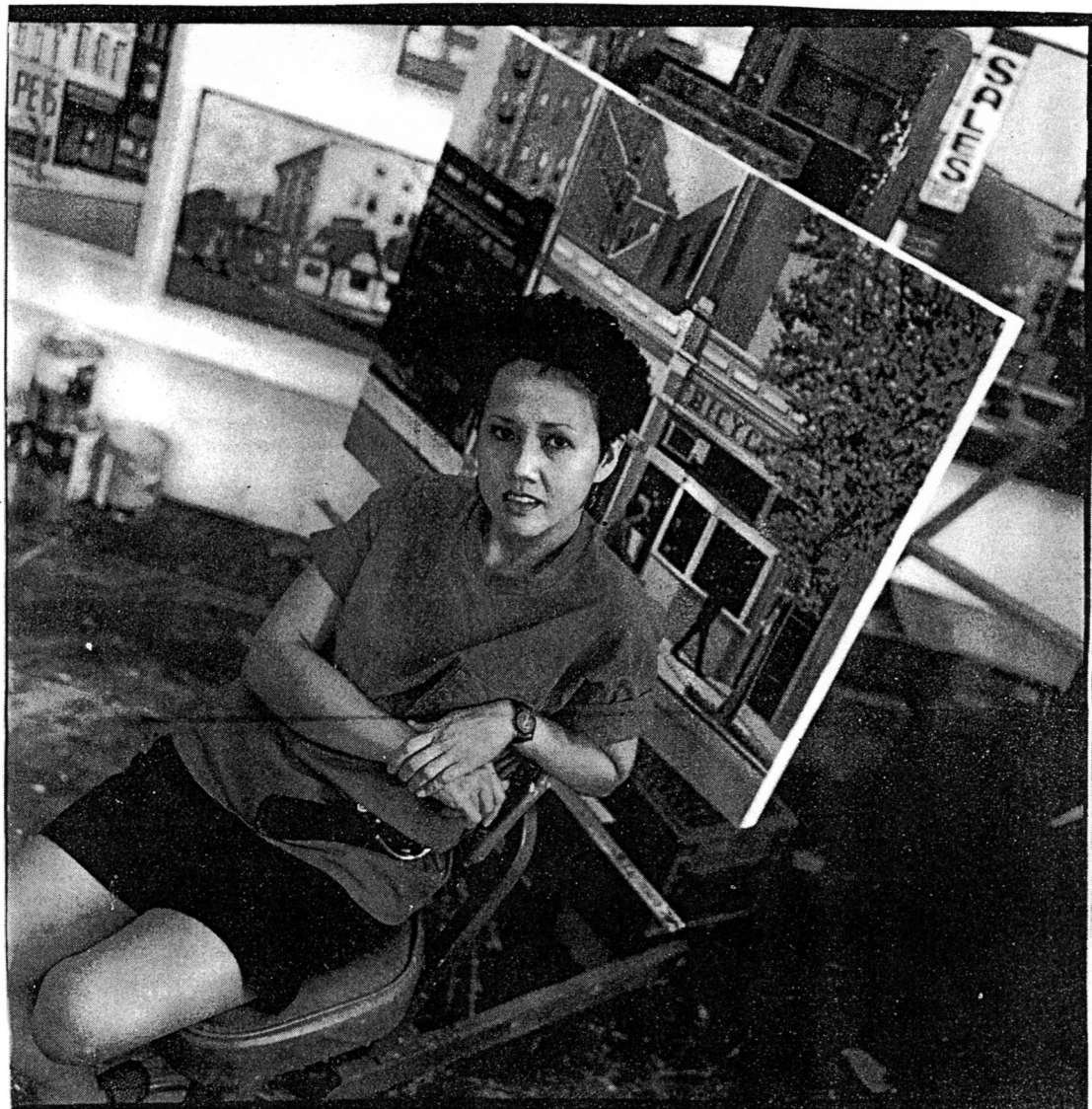
Maria Josefa Godofrida Paredes Mánlapaz was born in Quezon City, a town close to Manila, in 1954. She is the youngest of eight children. "I was an unexpected delight," as she prefers to phrase it. A sister nicknamed her Joey.

She was raised in a strict Catholic home in the Philippines; her mother still calls every Sunday to see if she went to church.

"I have stayed away from the rituals, but my beliefs are very strong," explains Mánlapaz, who jokingly admits that her partner of three years, Christine Steiner, accuses her of being "so Catholic." Mánlapaz acknowledges being a bit old-fashioned and attributes it to her isolated upbringing.

"Even though I have seven brothers and sisters, I grew up basically as an only child because of the gap in years," she says. "My oldest sibling is 21 years my senior."

Perhaps recognizing the need for her reclusive daughter to build self-confidence, Mánlapaz's mother arranged for



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A Personal Crusade

Painter Joey Mánlapaz wants to 'preserve what once was'

painting lessons with a private instructor, who happened to be a leading Filipino artist of the time, Diosdado Lorenzo.

All-girl Catholic schools, both in the Philippines and in Washington — Mánlapaz attended the Immaculate Conception Academy which used to be at 24th and K streets — may have stifled her self-expression, but probably helped foster a keen sense of discipline and work ethic.

Later, as an undergraduate at George Washington University, Mánlapaz continued to study painting, but she also took classes in zoology. "My father, who was

a dentist, wanted me to become a doctor, and even after I received my graduate degree in painting and was invited by Imelda Marcos to exhibit my work in Manila, he encouraged me to consider medical school."

After earning her undergraduate degree, Mánlapaz found herself still undecided about a career. Bowing to the pressure from her father, she took pre-med courses and began graduate work at Johns Hopkins, aiming to become a medical illustrator.

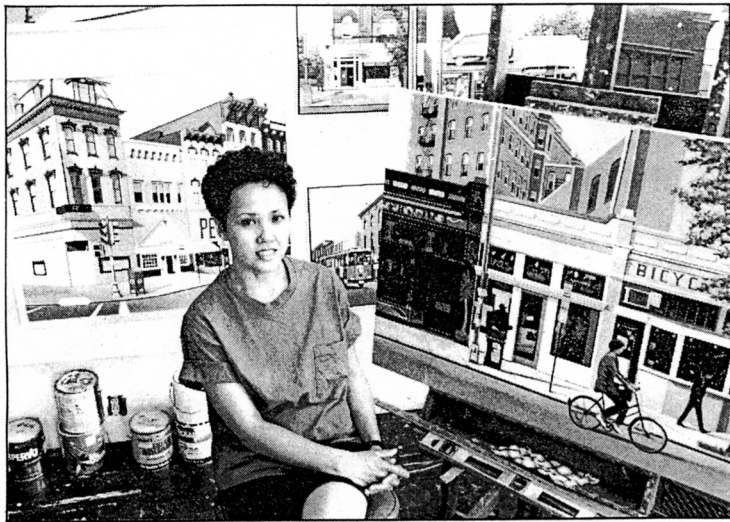
"I lasted half a semester," she re-

members. "They threw some animal's internal organ at us and told us to draw it. I was disgusted."

Her experience at Johns Hopkins seems to have jolted her. Deciding that her father's disappointment would be the lesser of two evils, she finally abandoned the idea of a career in medicine.

"We used to have big screaming matches," Mánlapaz emphasizes the word "big," her arms outstretched to illustrate the volume of their confrontations. "In retrospect, I realize that he only wanted

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by Lenny Gonzalez

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A Personal Crusade

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me to be financially secure, and he did not think I would be if I pursued painting as a career."

When asked about her decision to pursue painting, Mánlapaz admits to a desire to prove to her father that she could be successful. She also wanted to break free of the confining culture of her youth.

During this, her first interview with the Gay press, Mánlapaz reflects on the fact that she sensed from an early age that she was different. When she emigrated to the United States with her parents and a younger adopted brother, her life became chaotic.

"Not just any confusion," she emphasizes. "A tumultuous heap of confusion."

In the right crowd

After her experience at Johns Hopkins, Mánlapaz moved out of her parent's home to live with a sister. She decided to study painting and began graduate school at George Washington University.

"I needed for at least one of the unresolved issues in my life to be worked out," she says. "I was certain the others would fall into place."

She credits graduate school and George Washington's Gay student group for bringing her out of her shell. "I came out in increments," she explains. "When I found myself with other serious-minded painters I gained the confidence to pursue my career and I also gained the confidence to acknowledge my sexuality."

While in graduate school, Mánlapaz traveled to France to study landscape painting in Brittany. Her painting style at that time was impressionistic — a loose, free style that captured a mood with minimal details.

When she returned from Brittany, Mánlapaz was lost looking for lush green valleys. Without a landscape to paint, Mánlapaz focused on people. Her first subjects were her newfound Lesbian friends.

Riding the wave of feminism in the late '70s, Mánlapaz's graduate thesis was about how women artists represent the female body in their work. It's still a

topical question in the '90s, and Mánlapaz says she often thinks of building on her early research.

For now, though, Mánlapaz wants to paint. "I work the streets," she explains. "I'm out by 10 — that's 10 a.m. — looking for it." This is a routine she has practiced for the last decade. While she was still painting portraits, Mánlapaz moved on to still-life, which eventually evolved into an interest in street scenes.

Armed with a 35mm camera, Mánlapaz drives through neighborhoods on the lookout for what she calls "it," the corner or building which appeals to her. She takes a series of photographs and later aligns the prints to reassemble the scene. Transforming the image from photograph to canvas is an exercise in drafting and perspective, disciplines which Mánlapaz feels more artists need to develop.

Mánlapaz has been teaching her students the techniques of realist painting, skills which are slowly becoming more in demand as artists return to realism. Since 1984, Mánlapaz has been a lecturer for the Resident Associate Program of the Smithsonian and in 1987 was appointed as Adjunct Professor at Northern Virginia Community College.

As if her schedule weren't busy enough, she has works in three exhibits this summer. In addition to the University Club, Mánlapaz's paintings will be on display at Gallery K and in Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton's office.

Taking home one of Mánlapaz's paintings, rich in the bright colors of her youth, dignified in appearance and inviting to the eye, one takes home a little bit of the past.

"My personal crusade," Mánlapaz explains, "is to hold up these images and preserve what once was."

The ultimate strength of Mánlapaz's work is in what it suggests — that the community loses much more than four walls and a roof when it abandons its old neighborhoods.

"Cityscapes," a collection of paintings by Joey P. Mánlapaz, is on display until Aug. 13 at the University Club, 1135 16th St., N.W. For more information, call (202) 862-8800.