

Thousands sign online protest vs Caparas

by CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA
Inquirer.net

MANILA -- An online petition to declare comic book writer-illustrator and film director Carlo J. Caparas as "not deserving" of his recent National Artist award has collected 2,594 signatures as of Sunday evening.

Titled "Carlo J. Caparas is Not Qualified to be National Artist", the petition was said to be posted by Gerry Alanguilan, a comic book illustrator from San Pablo City.

In his petition, Alanguilan said: "Many of us in the artists community were shocked and appalled that Carlo J. Caparas was named National Artist for Visual Arts and Film (in) July 2009."

"Although we recognize the work and accomplishments of Caparas within the comic book industry as well as television and film, we strongly believe that his body of work does not live up to the tradition of excellence the title of National Artist entails."

It added: "As Philippine artists and concerned citizens who feel that our artistic legacy as a nation is compromised by these events, we strongly and vehemently put forward this protest."

Caparas produced a slew of crime movies such as *The Cecilia Masagca Story: Antipolo Massacre*, *The Untold Story: Vizconde Massacre 2*, *Lipa Arandia Massacre*, and *The Marita Gonzaga Rape-Slay: In God We Trust!*

Critics have panned those films -- all box office hits -- for their gratuitous violence, bad acting and even crude technical effects.

"It is appalling to us that someone who has made a living exploiting the lowest common denominator in films...shall now be placed in the same league as Manuel Conde and Lino Brocka, the greatest filmmakers in the Philippines..." Alanguilan's petition read.

Caparas was not the lone target of criticism among this year's National Artists. The other was Cecille Guidote-Alvarez, who was chosen by Ms Arroyo for her accomplishments in theater.

Critics objected to the manner of

selecting Caparas and Alvarez, noting that they were not included in the list of nominees screened by the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the National Commission for Culture and Arts, which had committees assigned to do the recommendations.

They also raised the issue of propriety because Alvarez heads the NCCA.

Other critics of Caparas include previous National Artist awardees F. Sionil Jose, Virgilio Almario and Bien Lumbera. Visual artist Ben Cabrera and singer Celeste Legazpi and actor Leo Martinez also put in their objections.

On the other hand, Caparas has received support from former censors chief Manuel Morato and Dante Jimenez, head of the nongovernment Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption (VACC). Expressions of support also came from boxing hero Manny Pacquiao, Senators Ramon Revilla Jr. and Jose "Jinggoy" Estrada, Joe Lad Santos of the Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino and Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) president Dante Guevarra.

Morato said Caparas did more to spread the national language through his comic book stories than many of his critics. His famous characters are *Ang Panday* (a goldsmith whose sword attains magical powers and fights for the oppressed), *Bakekang* (an ugly woman who lives vicariously through the stardom of her beautiful daughter) and *Totoy Bato* (a poor farmer who becomes a boxing champion), among others.

Caparas also got support from his community, *Barangay* (Village) *Ugong in Pasig*, and his former school teachers, who hailed the comic and film director as their top achiever. He was a glass factory worker and later, a security guard before becoming a comics novelist and later film director. ■

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