**Becoming a Gay Camarero: *Pagsasanto* as a Gendered**

**Social Practice**

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***Abstract***

The history of *pagsasanto* illuminates a devotional practice exclusively performed by old-rich women and prominent political families. As such, being a *camarera* elucidates of a symbolic capital anchored on social stature, religious influence, and political power. At present, the growing interest and participation of gay camareros has redefined the meanings of devotion and ways devotion is practiced through *pagsasanto*. This phenomenon paved the way for gay *camareros* to create spaces for them to be able to perform, negotiate and construct their identity within the realm of catholic devotion. The contemporary era marks the golden age of *pagsasanto* as a devotional practice dominated by gay men as described by gay *camarero*s themselves.  From the periphery to the forefront of catholic devotion, religious tradition and practices have been restructured highlighting the significant roles of gay men in catholic devotion and religious practices. This historical shift has created new social roles and social platforms for gender performativity at home and the larger social system. The becoming of a gay *camarero* is rooted in cultural practice and familial catholic tradition. Moreover, the changing meanings of *pagsasanto* are contingent on gender performativity, market, social media and the growing social networks of gay camareros.

Keywords: Gay Camarero, Pagsasanto, Gender, Social Practice

**Introduction**

*(Kapag pinasabog ang Marian Procession sa Intramuros, malaking porsiyento sa populasyon ng mga bakla ang mawawala.* When the Marian procession in Intramuros gets bombed, a huge percentage of gay population will vanish – **Jorryl**)

The joke shared by a saint caretaker signifies an operative metaphor depicting a historic shift in the religious image caretaking dominated by old rich women (*donya*) in the past to their modern counterparts, the gay *camereros* at present. Such religious landscape is continuously redefined and appropriated through the structure-agency nexus (i.e, the roles of culture, politics and market vis-a-vis the identity construction of the gay *camareros*). Hence, the dialectic implicitly and explicitly shapes and reshapes devotional meanings and religious practices. In the process, the paradigm shift of *pagsasanto* as a religious practice is mediated by complex dynamics of socio-cultural forces. To unravel this issue, the ethnography sought to answer the following problems: a) What constitutes the historic turn of *pagsasanto* from *camarera* to gay *camarero* as a caretaker of a sacred image?; b) How is gender performed, negotiated, and constructed through *pagsasanto*?; c) What conditions facilitate, constrain and perpetuate *pagsasanto* as a social phenomenon?

Historicity of Image Caretaking

Civilization thrived in the Philippine archipelago even before the country was named. Early settlers of the islands had their own culture, political system, economic relations involving local and foreign trade, religious beliefs and practices, and fascination in the arts. Modern archaeology provides empirical data on how our ancestors supposedly lived and survived ages in the pre-Hispanic era.

Contrary to common notion, the Philippines was not entirely an Islamic country before the Spaniards came. The pre-Hispanic belief system of Filipinos consisted of a pantheon of gods, spirits, creatures, and men that guarded the streams, fields, trees, mountains, forests, and houses. *Bathala*, who created earth and man, was superior to these other gods and spirits. Regular sacrifices and prayers were offered to placate these deities and spirits--some of which were benevolent, some malevolent. Wood and metal images represented ancestral spirits, and no distinction was made between the spirits and their physical symbol. Reward or punishment after death was dependent upon behavior in this life (Miller, 2016).

Animism or the belief of Filipinos in different deities guiding their moral and cultural way of life has its own system. They have spiritual leaders who act as priests/priestesses known as the *Babaylan*. Anyone who had reputed power over the supernatural and natural was automatically elevated to a position of prominence. Every village had its share of shamans and priests who competitively plied their talents and carried on ritual curing (Miller, 2016); To be a *babaylan* is a gift to the person chosen by the spirit (Geremia-Lachica, 2011).

As a common practice, the *babaylan is* usually female as the male roles are implied in the more political aspect of the society. Be that as it may, there are males known to be the spiritual mediator of a society. In his report on the *Visayans* in the Samar-Leyte area, Fray Alcina noted that priests and sacrificers were commonly women, but there were also male *babaylans*. (He wrote) “If there was a man who might have been one, he was (called) *asog*.” Fray Fernandez also mentioned Tapara, an *asog* or male *babaylan* of *Lambunao*, Iloilo who dressed and acted like a female. Fray Alcina further explained the *asog* as “impotent men and deficient of the practice of matrimony, considered themselves more like women than men in their manner of living or going about, even in their occupations Geremia-Lachica, 2011).

It is not foreign to ancient Filipinos to see males dressing up or acting in the female role. In his notes on the Sambals, Fray Domingo Perez mentioned about male priests called *bayoc*. The term *bayoc* is close to the Cebuano “*bayot*” which refers to a male homosexual (Geremia-Lachica, 2011). Looking into this context, is homosexuality something not only tolerable but widely accepted back in the day? Having been lifted up to a social category with much importance and power, gays of the pre-hispanic Philippine society may have more of the freedom and luxury to exercise their gender in the role they play. According to Fray Francisco Ignacio Alcina, the *asog* was deficient in his performance as a male and thus deficient for matrimony. This might have lowered his worth or value in society which expects males to enter matrimony and beget children. But it was also this deficiency – his being more female which qualified him into the *babaylan* sisterhood. As a *babaylan*, the *asog* raises his worth and gains honor in a society which might have been unwelcoming of his kind (Geremia-Lachica, 2011).

In 1521, the Spaniards reached the Philippine Islands headed by no less than Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese explorer who became known as the first circumnavigator of the world. He did not only bring with him troops from Spain, he also brought with him the symbol of the faith he carries; a wooden cross that symbolizes Christianity and a wooden image of the Holy Child Jesus now revered as the Santo Niño de Cebu as a gift for Rajah Humabon on the day the natives got baptized. The image of the child Jesus was lost for quite some time but was later recovered by another Spanish expedition under Miguel Lopez de Legazpi. At present, the Santo Niño de Cebu is enshrined in the Minor Basilica of the Holy Child in Cebu and the cross is inside a chapel nearby.

The Filipinos were eventually converted into Christianity especially those living in Luzon and the Visayas as where most Spanish influences abound. The Spanish seldom had to resort to military force to win over converts, instead the impressive display of pomp and circumstance, clerical garb, images, prayers, and liturgy attracted the rural populace. (Miller, 2016) The pageantry of processions and different liturgical ceremonies inside and outside the church walls kept people interested, so much so that during the Spanish rule, Filipinos refer to the Liturgical Calendar in comparison to the seasons they observe.

Currently, reflections of this pomp and pageantry transcends to modern Filipino Catholics. From floral decorations to the images venerated in both public venues and private homes, aesthetics and proper iconographies are observed. The Church took over the technical aspect of maintaining these images through the Directory on Popular Piety while caretakers of the images observe different practices to make sure their images look presentable and aesthetically pleasing to the public eye.

Many images of old are kept by families handing it down from one generation to the next. In doing so, they also impart the knowledge on how the images are vested and kept. They also leave the responsibilities of vesting the image and observing the traditions involved with the church and the image they take care. Apart from these age-old images are new-ones being commissioned by new Santo Enthusiasts or those who are interested in the practice of taking care of *santos*. To note, these new breed of *camareros* or image caretakers commission new images not only because of their passion for the religious arts but also of devotion. In a recent study about female images and the devotional meanings attached to them, it was found out that there is an increasing number of *camareros* who belong to the LGBT community. It is also noted in the study of the basis of these gay men in choosing their images, at least, in the Holy week procession. From the marginalization of women to the marginalization of the LGBT community, a trend can be seen from the social reproduction of the meanings imparted by the Jewish minority from the time of Christ. It is transparent by the number of image caretakers belonging to the LGBT community prefer women saints to take care of. They have sprung forth not only for the aesthetics of vesting female images but the interests come deep within the understanding of their social significance as minorities and their religious connection as a devotion towards the female saint.

Much to the interest of modern-day *camareros*, not only holy week images are being commissioned. Different images of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints are being made regularly in the woodcarving towns of Bacolor in Pampanga and Paete in Laguna. It is interesting that a lot of gay men participate in commissioning new images for private devotional purposes or new images for public veneration (i.e., processions and exhibits). With social media taking over modern-day society, these *camareros* converge in different social media groups especially in Facebook. One of the more popular Facebook groups for Santo Enthusiasts is *Esculturas Religiosas En Las Filipinas* (formerly known as *Esculturas Religiosas Hermosas En Las Filipinas*). The group started from Flickr, a photo-sharing site. It continued to exist on Facebook with different discussions about holy images including vestments, accessories and floral decorations. Another interesting fact is that the apart from having members from all over the Philippines, the population of *Esculturas* consists of mostly gay men.

*Pagsasanto* is redefined in a manner that this devotional practice shifts from the old ways of the families doing it altogether to *camareros* having individual inclinations. It is not that this has not existed before. It is just that many of these individuals have emerged in continuing the tradition of commissioning and taking care of sacred images. It also gives an identity to a *camarero* that it has been part of their character to have the taste for the aesthetics not only of the decorations and vestments but of the craftsmanship of the image itself.

The social implications of the nature of this craft is the widening network especially now that metal artisans, vestment makers and embroiderers, and wood workers are now available online through their social media pages. The societal shift from a communal activity now sees a broader perspective with people from different provenances converging in a single social unit.

**Methodology**

This paper employed ethnography as research methodology. For Angosino (2008), it means a description of a people. The purpose of ethnography is to understand the culture of a group of people (Wolcott, 1990) and communicate this understanding to others (Spradley and McCurdy, 1990). The concept of culture is central in ethnography. Thus, an ethnographer writes in relation to culture. Hence, this ethnography reflects how the culture of *pagsasanto* has changed over time. Following Ortner’s  (2006) post-structural view of culture, this paper takes the assumption that culture is a contested process of meaning-making reflected in the structure-agency nexus.

**Results and Discussion**

Gender Performativity, Identity Construction, and Negotiation

*Pagsasanto* is a social domain that enables gay camareros to create spaces for identity construction across period of time. Within this religious realm, gay camareros are positioned and repositioned in a strategic social platform that allows them to exercise their agency, showcase their talents, improve their skills and negotiate their identity.  *Pagsasanto* as a legitimized practice within the catholic religion, cannot deny the crucial roles of gay *camareros* in perpetuating *pagsasanto* as a significant religious practice and its legitimacy as popular culture.  The increasing number of gay camareros practicing *pagsasanto* as a devotional practice enunciates a phenomenological epoch of voices and ideas of a specific gender that once suppressed by the rigid catholic tradition. At present, such a voice has dominated *pagsasanto* as a Catholic religious tradition.

*Pagsasanto,* as a realm that captures gays’ interest and attention, does not only speak of religious tolerance and social acceptance towards gays, but also a constructed social platform constituted by the performance of gender. For Butler (1988), performativity of gender is a stylized repetition of acts, an imitation or miming of the dominant conventions of gender. What gravitates gay *camareros* towards *pagsasanto* illuminates their performance of their capacities to cultivate and reproduce religious practices highlighting their gender identity, social roles and clout.  From a micro perspective, *pagsasanto* is a field of gender performativity, identity construction and negotiation articulated in *pag-aalaga, paggagayak and pagsama sa prusisyon.*

**Pag-aalaga**

*(Ang pag-aalaga ng Santo Nino ay malaking bahagi ng aking pagiging bata hanggang sa aking paglaki*. Taking care of Sto. Nino has been an important part of my life from childhood to adulthood. **–Ernest**).

*Pagsasanto* is a crucial part of growing up from childhood to adulthood.  It is a family tradition that shows commitment and relentless socialization with catholic devotional practices that stems from domestic enculturation and upbringing. This religious family tradition sustains ties with the religious catholic tradition of the town. Surprisingly, the three-gay interlocutors come from different provenances (i.e. Marikina, Laguna and Bulacan) where *pagsasanto* is strongly practiced.

Family values and beliefs are also articulated in religious practices. Inevitably, traditional catholic beliefs do not favor early expressions of gayness. Males are made to act firmly, while females are trained to behave modestly. In a mainstream religion, gender is performed through social practices that demarcate masculinity from femininity. For a rigid Catholic family, a boy is expected to play with a car or a gun. Interestingly, the three gay camareros lamented that their gender expressions during children were restricted to male-specific toys and games. It was a taboo for a boy to play dolls.  However, the strict Catholic family is tolerant to boys who opt to take care of a female saint. Part of each participant’s vivid *pagsasanto* childhood experience was playing with an image of a saint, Jesus Christ, or the Virgin Mary. They dressed up the image and spoke to it. It never escaped their childhood memory how they creatively made a *karo-karosa* (little carriages for a sacred image) which they decorated with flowers or colorful cloth.

Apparent in their narratives were their active engagement in church activities as church-goers, members of choir and altar boys. Adolescent period is a continued stage of life of exploring *pagsasanto.* As shared by the interlocutors, within the adolescent period or towards the adult stage, several camareros tried to enter the seminary in preparation for priesthood. It is important to note that the admission of gay identity usually occurs after realizing that priesthood was not a vocation for them.

On the other hand, gay camareros were able sustain and enrich their devotion through *pagsasanto* in spite of venturing into a different field. As they earn more, taking care of their *santo/s* or *santa/s* become more sophisticated. It is a normative practice for a seasoned gay camarero to  own a saint image made of ivory and dress up with stylish and elegant dress usually made of expensive cloths and precious stones.

The Camarero and his Religious Image/s

For gay camareros, taking care of a saint is enmeshed in the family day-to-day activities that involve consulting the saint for intercession, yielding to supplication, asking for guidance and divine providence. The relation is seen as bidirectional because saints provide luck, blessings and protection. Oftentimes, saints reveal their messages in dreams. They communicate through signs and hints behind life-changing circumstances. As Jorryl shared, *nang ang kapatid ko ay nabuntis, inilihim niya ito sa amin*. *Inisip niya magpa-abort, ngunit nagpakita at kinausap siya ng Mahal na Birhen sa kaniyang panaginip. Nagkalakas siya ng loob na sabihin at ipagpatuloy ang pagbubuntis.* (When my sister got pregnant, she kept it to herself. She thought of committing abortion, but the Virgin Mary appeared and spoke to her in her dream. She developed the courage to tell us and continued her pregnancy). Since then, Jorryl’s sister began to take care of her own image of the Virgin Mary. Unlike his sister, Jorryl’s story as a caretaker did not emerge from a cathartic experience. His fascination towards patron saints developed as he got exposed to religious routines involving *pagsasanto* which began during childhood. His faith was challenged when his mother was diagnosed with cancer. He prayed to Virgin Mary to save his mother but eventually her mother died. He developed hatred with the Virgin Mary. His devotion was revived when he realized that her mother’s memory lives in their familial Marian devotion through the persuasion of his father.

Pagpapamana

Passing the responsibility of patron saint caretaking among members of the family is a crucial decision. Qualifications include strong inclination towards *pagsasanto* usually cultivated in early childhood years; apparently, someone who can devote sufficient time for caretaking (i.e. dressing up the image, offering of prayers, and preparing for the processions). S/he should also be adept with knowledge about the image’s history as well as their family history of *pagsasanto.* Conventionally, family members (mostly women) confined with household chores were assigned to perform patron saint caretaking. As Jorryl recalled, the chain of female *camareras* had stopped when there was no straight female successor in the family. Only his lesbian aunts were left next in line but no one among them accepted the responsibility. His gay uncle took the custody of their family patron saint. Such succession was strongly favored by the family because of his passion in *pagsasanto*.

Another important family tradition of *pagsasanto* is that an image is used as an item for gift-giving. To the receiver, it is a blessing that needs to be taken care of.  In turn, it is perceived that the patron saint protects and blesses the caretaker.

**Paggagayak**

*(Mas magandang ayusan ang babaeng santo, kasi pwede mo syang landiin –* It is more interesting to decorate a female saint because you can play with it. – Jobert)

*The Process of Learning*

*Paggagayak* (decorating the image and the carroza) is a social role dominated by gay *camareros* or florists. The skill of *pagagayak* is acquired through informal learning that usually stems from childhood experience of playing *karu-karuhan*. The skills start to develop as the child engages in an imaginative play and usually reinforces the acceptance towards the practice. As Jake narrated*, namimitas ako ng bulaklak sa paligid at pinagamit kong pangdekorasyon sa karosa;* I pick flowers from the surroundings and use them to decorate the carroza). *Pagagayak* is ingrained in the *communities of practice* which is usually learned through observation, apprenticeship and mentorship. Adult gay *camareros* play a crucial role in the mentoring process.

*Pagagayak as a Domain of Gay Camareros’ Artistry*

I asked the guard-on-duty during the gayakan: *Bakit mga lalaki at hindi babae ang nag-aayos ng mga bulaklak?*, Why are males decorating the karosa and not females?) He replied: *Mga Vicky Belo sila (colloquial terms for gay).  Diyan naman sila magaling eh, kaya sila ang nag-aayos.* They are gays. They are good at it that is why they are the ones assigned to do the task.

Gayakan happens the day before the actual procession. Many *camareros* in Metro Manila and nearby provinces flock to Dangwa in Manila to purchase freshly delivered flowers to be used as decorations for the *carroza*.  Some flowers needed to be revived so it could sustain its form until the end of the procession. Usually, the *carroza* is decorated with flowers once the image is already fixed on top of the *carroza.*

Decorating the *carroza* follows the symmetrical and asymmetrical designs. A symmetrical design is executed through a balanced distribution of decorative materials or floral arrangement, whereas asymmetrical is its opposite. Designs are in line with the theme and usually planned through brainstorming for a week. It is common especially for gay *camareros* not to replicate the previous years’ designs.

Apart from dressing up images for the procession, the *carroza* undergoes beautification as well. The *sayal* or curtain under the *carroza* is washed or is replaced with a new one. The colors and patterns depend on the gender of the image (or the scene being depicted in case of tableaus) borne in procession. Most gay *camareros* prefer female saint images to be decorated because they can explore many colors and artistic designs. To gay *camareros*, their preference towards female saints especially to the Virgin Mary depicts their attachment to their mothers.

Indeed, the patron saint as an object and subject of gender expressions mirrors gay camareros’ identity and artistry including the meanings of the relations they have with their sacred image/s.

**Pagsama sa Prusisyon**

*Walang straight dito sa prusisyon. Yung nagbubuhat lang ng carroza ang straight* (There is no straight man who joins in the procession. Only the carriers of the *carroza* are straight) – Francis

The procession is the most significant part of *pagsasanto*. Processions are considered as devotional practices done by the faithful in observance of different religious aims. According to the Roman Catholic Church, processions are cultic expressions of a universal character and have multiple social and religious significance. In them, the relationship between Liturgy and popular piety is especially important (Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2001).   In this event the holy image of the gay *camerero* joins the pageantry and is introduced to the public. Camereros with their (mostly) gay friends walk behind the carroza in the procession. In the La Naval’s feast, gay participants in the procession wear white dress shirts and black pants. They also wear scapulars with rosaries in their hands while saying the prayer to the Virgin Mary during the procession.  In such event, the performance of gay identity is construed to be a religious act. While the Virgin Mary is venerated as holy, gay *camareros* are likewise looked up to as dignified caretakers. That is, gays (regardless of types) behave in accordance to the norm. In one way or another, the masculine dimension of the gay gender performance is observed especially in terms of dress code and decorum.

For gay *camareros,* becoming a full pledged *santero* happens when a *camarero’s* patron saint has complemented the whole process of pageantry. This marks the end of the *liminal* period and the reincorporation of the *initiand* into his new social position in the world of *pagsasanto*. In this process, strong support system from other gay *camareros* (and other friends who are members of the LGBT community but not particularly religious) is extended to help the *initiand* navigate the challenges*. Pagagayak and pagsama sa prusisyon* are a site of cooperation among gay *camareros.* For example, one *camarero* from Malolos City, Bulacan shares his story that he joined the procession without having a concrete plan. He never really intended to join the procession but was persuaded by his peers to join the longest Sto. Nino procession in mainland Luzon, the solemn procession in honor of the Sto. Nino de Malolos. He doesn’t have a carroza nor has his own generator set. With the help of peers and networks, he was able to have a successful salida for his Sto. Nino last January 2016. He bought whatever is necessary and had a few sleepless nights just to get by and everything paid off in the end. And it was followed with another procession a week after with the celebration in honor of Sto. Nino de Paombong in Paombong, Bulacan.

However, for a grand such as the La Naval, the cost for the preparations range from 30, 000.00 Php to more than 100,000.00 Php. Expensive *carrozas* such as those that cost more than 100.000.00 Php are usually decorated with gold decorative materials. As the socio-economic status of a *camarero* gets better, the amount of preparations gets bigger as well.  This entails that the social stature is defined by the price of the images under his possession. Famous *camareros* own images made of ivory or antiques acquired from old families or antique shops.

The glamorous and elegant presentation of the image during the procession contradicts the history of martyrdom and tales of simplicity of the saint it represents. As Henry noted (an expert florist and a camarero), the pageant explicitly conveys competing social status among *camareros.* From an observer’s point of view, the pageantry seemed to be a parade of candidates in the beauty contest who wear exquisite and expensive gowns. *I can’t help to ask myself, whose identity is paraded, celebrated and venerated in the procession?*

**Political Economy**

(*Hindi na mawawala ang pagsasanto dahil malakas na ang demand ng mga santo at gamit nito sa mercado*. Pagsasanto will not vanish because of the strong demand for images and their accessories in the market) – Mario

Catholic tradition is full of life and meanings in *pagsasanto.* The increasing number of gay camareros and their legitimized social roles and talent has been reinforced by the social forces that shape and reshape *pagsasanto.* Different types of business proliferate through *pagsasanto*. These include woodcarving of the images, job painting, dress making, embroidery, flower business and accessories.

For woodcarving,there are three types of images a person can choose from. The *detallado* image or the fully carved image is a type of *santo* where the whole image from the hair to the vestment is carved in wood, (sometimes in ivory). There is also the *de vestir* which has two types; the manikin and the *bastidor*. It is called *devestir* because it gives the *camarero* the freedom to dress the image. The first kind of *de vestir* is the *manikin*. It got its name from the way its body was carved. The head and hands are often detachable. The body is carved with pivots and joints so it can be easily moved like a mannequin or a doll. Most gay *camareros* have these type of *santos* especially when they have male images. For those who opt to save more or are in need of a shape based on the vestment the image has to wear, a *bastidor*  image is best for them. The chest up to the torso is carved in the *manikin* manner but what you see below are some wood pieces called *andador* that are then attached to the base as support to create the rest of the statue.

Many gay *camareros* have an inclination to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Oftentimes, they have an image of her made in the *bastidor* fashion so as to have the dress of the Virgin enveloping the shape that the *andador* or wood panels provide. This provides the A-shape needed for the skirt of the Virgin

From the carving comes the paint job for the images. Many people have their images carved by a certain wood carver and hand them over to an *encarnador* so s/he can beautify the image with a few retouches on the carving and paint the image over to give it life. Famous *encarnadors* like the late Tom Joven and Alberto Panganiban do repairs and restorations for images. Their *talleres* or workshops offer various treatments to *santos* who need their services. They do not only cater to newly carved *santos*, Tom Joven for example did some restoration works for a few *coronadas* or canonically crowned images in the Philippines like *Nuestra Señora del BuenSuceso* (Our Lady of Good Events), *Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria de Jaro* (Our Lady of the Candles of Jaro), and *Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados de Marikina* (Our Lady of the Abandoned of Marikina). Their works are sort of their resumes and camareros are willing to spend a lot of money just so they can have their services and have the best for the image/s under their care.

Now that the image has been formed and painted, the next task would be to dress them up. At this stage, there are several options for a *santo* enthusiast. A few of those who can afford usually bring home the image after production and have their *burdadera* or their trusted embroiderer do the fitting. Some ask the *imaginero* or the *talleres* of the carver/*encarnador* to deliver the image in simple garments. Many others, mostly gay *camareros* bring home the image. They have it delivered or they fetch it at the *talleres* and wrap the image in a cloth. They bring it home and do the measurements themselves. Either they have their own seamstress or they tailor the dress by themselves

Beads and patches are also common in the *pagsasanto* industry. Beadworks are sewn through a pattern laid out in the dress. This is also considered bead embroidery. Many intricate patterns can be done using beads. Patches on the other hand are ready made patterned designs from either readily available lace fabrics or the ones sold per piece with different designs to compliment a single dress. It is common to see patchworks done with gold patches to imitate the gold hand embroidered vestments. Others intentionally use other colors to provide variety in the patchwork commonly seen by people.

There are different embroidery styles and beadwork is just one of them. There are also machine embroideries, computerized machine embroideries and hand embroideries. Embroidery according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary is the art or process of forming decorative designs with hand or machine needlework. Gay *camareros* love these embroidered designs for its intricacy and because these types of vestments have been around for years. Embroideries in vestments are never out of style as far as *pagsasanto* is concerned. They are already part of the culture in which these gay *santo* enthusiasts are accustomed to and every gay *camarero* aspires to have embroidered vestments for their images at some point in their life. After all, embroidery works come at a price and regardless of the material, it will be costly. This signifies that embroidery for others are just designed vestments for images but for gay *camareros*, these intricate and costly designs are offerings they serve in humility, supplication, and thanksgiving to their image as part of their devotion.

In hand embroidery, you can have two options; you can either use synthetic gold thread or authentic metal threads. Synthetic threads are more budget friendly because the materials are inexpensive and locally available. It also does not tarnish and the color does not fade away. This does not mean it comes cheap. Using synthetic threads can save you money but you will still spend a lot considering that the process of hand embroidering a vestment is labor intensive. The second option is the use of authentic metal threads. These threads are made of metal gilt in gold or silver. They give of that natural shine because of the material itself. This is imported from Pakistan, India, the Middle East, or in Spain. These threads do not come cheap and when used, they will make an elegant but pricey ensemble. They are considered top of the line material and are usually seen in images of antiquity and with images under the care of prominent *camareros*. They tarnish and the color fades away which gives off the more antique effect. Many gay *camareros* love this look because it gives them a sense of antiquity with the whole image itself. The overall look of antiquity with century-old images owned by the prominent rich families of old left a mark in the hearts of these gay *santo* enthusiasts. The aged beauty sits well with their love for the artistry of the craft.

Now that the image is dressed, the only thing it needs are the accessories it should wear to complete the overall look. Metal artisans like Ben Torres and Dodong Azares are known for this craft. Most images use brass accessories gilt in either gold or silver. They are significant in a sense that it completes not only the look but the iconography of a *santo*. There are varieties like the *aureola* used as a halo for saints both male and female. This is not used though for the image of Jesus Christ. Jesus uses the *tres potencias* or the three powers it represents. It also symbolizes the trinity. For saints, it is usual to see the common *aureola* or the *aureola de paraguas* also known as the payong. This is the halo attached to a long slender metal rod to fix on the head. For female saints, it is usually accompanied by a *diadema* or short tiara. For the Virgin Mary, the *estrellas* is a variant of the *aureola* with stars attached at the end symbolizing what was written in the revelations where she was crowned with stars and clothed with the sun and the moon below her feet. Some *Virgenes* wear the *rostrillos* which encircles the face of Mary showing her countenance as radiant and full of grace. There are also images wearing a *resplandor* which is a version of the *rostrillos* but is open at the bottom and is usually worn by a Dolorosa or the sorrowful image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The *rafaga* is the set of rays representing light imbued in the Virgin. This is commonly seen in images of the Lady of Guadalupe as based on the original framed *tilma*.

Most of the *talleres* where images are sculpted and painted are found in Pampanga and Laguna. There are some in Manila and in Bulacan but the concentration of the works are in the first two provinces. Apart from *santo* sculptures, these two provinces also supply *carrozas* used by images that join processions. For flowers, Baguio is famous in Northern Luzon for the wide array of variety it offers and the cheap price it offers. In Manila, Dangwa is the go to place even for those who are in nearby provinces like Rizal, Cavite, and Bulacan. Laguna supplies tropical varieties of flowers which are commonly used in the province. Most of the *lateros* or metal artisans are found in Metro Manila. Meycauayan, Bulacan is a go to place for those interested in authentic silver and gold accessories. Gay *camareros* know these places by heart because they frequent here from time to time checking out what they can get or just for the supplication of their needs as *camareros*.

In the age of social media and the growing population of *camareros* today, the demand is growing and so does the economy behind it. The artistry spreads among the circle as it grows larger. The social networks involved in *pagsasanto* cultivate the market by showing the latest trend in vesting images or the designs that are in season. As this trend is dictated, the need grows and business gets busy. At the same time, the market is growing to meet the demands of the growing number of consumers. The variety now raises quality at a lower cost to gain more patrons. Before, *santo* caretakers of old had a certain area of land dedicated to the *santo* so that whatever money is raised from that piece of land is given to the *santo* as funding for its needs. That is the reality before on how costly it is in taking care of religious images. Now, even students can raise money to commission an image and have it join the procession. With the current market readily available through social media and the aid of social networks in the world of *pagsasanto*, the shift from rich families to gay *camareros* is strengthened and is being sustained through inexpensive alternatives. This benefits those who cannot afford much but dreams of having their own processional image under their care. The more accepting Philippine society to gender also sustains this economy. Because more and more gays entering the professional, industrial and corporate world, many a gay *camarero* can afford what others weren’t able to acquire in previous decades.

**The Social Networks of Gay Camareros**

Social media became a platform for them to share their passion. It united them in the things they love the most.

Flickr was the first online platform for Santo Enthusiasts. Flickr is a photo-sharing site and it offers groups that have an organized pool of photos and discussions. This became famous for many gay *camareros* who want to share the photos they have about images.

Esculturas was established in Flickr on December 28, 2007. It was first named as Esculturas Religiosas Hermosas en las Filipinas. The group was created by Christian Layug, a *santo* enthusiast from Marikina. With more organized discussions and a systematized hierarchy of membership, Esculturas withstood the test of time and is now operating for almost nine years. From Flickr, Esculturas transitioned to Facebook to accommodate the growing number of members with this social media account. The group regulates ways in which *pagsasanto* needs to be observed.

Today, Esculturas is the largest of its kind in social media. It has remained strong because of the leadership of the administrators and with the continuous support of the members. It has launched several projects online like Santo of the Week and Esculturas Awards which recognizes exemplary images in the Philippines. They also give recognition to religious advocates and camareros who have exhibited exemplary behavior in the world of *pagsasanto*. The awardees are nominated by the members and the pool of nominees undergoes thorough deliberation from administrators and honorary members. It boasts of topics that have been discussed through intellectual and honest opinions of celebrated *santo* enthusiasts in the country.

To perform and run smoothly, Christian as the head administrator delegated the task to other administrators he has handpicked in order to aid him in running the group. Apart from the administrators, honorary members are there as consultants of the group. They have been given the title honorary members because of their exemplary work with their *santos* and because of the influence they have on fellow santo enthusiasts. One of these honorary members is Ms. Geraldine Roman of Orani, Bataan. She is also known as Congresswoman Geraldine Roman of the first district of Bataan. She is the first transgendered congresswoman elected in the Philippines. She is also a *camarero* with Jesus Nazareno and Dolorosa of Bataan under her care. She draws support from the group for her gender advocacies.

At present, Esculturas Religiosas en las Filipinas has over seven thousand followers on its Facebook Page. Not only that, the group boasts of over four thousand members. The members of the group are carefully selected and accepted in the group to avoid secret and fake accounts penetrating the group discussions. A considerable amount of the members are gay camareros. With an estimated number of 85% - 90% of the camareros and santo enthusiasts within the group being gay, it is easy to say how this network catered to the gay *camareros* having the same passion on religious sculptures.

Gay camareros seek the aid of each other in this aspect where they have a shared passion. As positioned actors in the social realm of pagsasanto, it is not difficult to understand how the support system the network offers enable gay camareros to aspire more and to be themselves. It enables them to establish an identity as a gay camarero that is unique and would only be entitled to them.

Indeed, the performance of gender is legitimized through *pagsasanto.* In the process of gender performativity the self is made. In turn, *pagsasanto* as a gendered social practice is continuously reconstructed and redefined.

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