

JUAN LUNA Y NOVICIO

(1857, Badoc, Ilocos Norte - 1899, Hongkong)

Spoliarium

1884, Rome

Oil on canvas

The Gift of Spain to the Philippines
National Fine Arts Collection



In one of his trips with his Professor, Alejo Vera, Juan Luna visited the Roman Ampitheater and saw the *spoliarium*—a large room at the basement of the Roman amphitheater where the bodies of gladiators and wild beasts are dragged and despoiled. He saw its thick and gloomy walls. The imagery he needed to imagine this Masterpiece was further inspired when he read a description of what went on in this room in a book by Carlos Luis Dezobry entitled *Rome au Siecle d' Auguste, un voyage d'un Gaulois à Rome* (Rome in the Time of Augustus).

Juan Luna worked on the *Spoliarium* for a period of eight months from June 1883 to March 1884 while he was in Rome as a scholar of the *Ayuntamiento de Manila*. It was first exhibited at the *Palazzi dell' Exposizione* at Via Nazionale before it was shipped to Madrid for the *Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes*. The *Spoliarium* was the first to win a gold medal, out of three given out during the competition.

After winning the gold medal at the Madrid Exposition, the *Spoliarium* was purchased by the Province of Barcelona in 1885 and displayed in the *Museo de Arte Moderno* in 1887, and was damaged during the Spanish Civil War (in the 1930s). It was then brought to the *Museo del Prado* in Madrid for restoration.

While undergoing conservation, the Spanish government heard of the Juan Luna Centennial Commission (JLCC) plan to acquire the painting and decided to give the painting as a gift from the Spanish to the Filipino people. The painting was cut into three parts and arrived in Manila on September 30, 1958. Restoration work began the next year, after Senator Quintin Paredes, JLCC chairman, assigned part of his office's budget for public works for the project. Conservation work was started on July 14, 1960 and completed on July 26, 1961. It was relined, cleaned, and restored by Architect Carlos E. da Silva and painter Antonio Dumlao.

The *Spoliarium* was unveiled at the Juan Luna Hall of the Foreign Affairs Building in Padre Faura on December 7, 1962 by President and Mrs. Diosdado Macapagal and Spanish Ambassador and Mrs. Jaime Alba. With a size of 4.22 meters in height and 7.675 meters in length, it is the largest painting in the Philippines and the largest painting in the National Fine Arts Collection.