



Kanto

CREATIVE CORNERS / N° IV, VOL. II, MMXVII

Make A Splash

THE COURAGE ISSUE

ANGLES

Magical realism with architectural visualization studios *Luxigon* and *MIR*

LENS

Unsplash starts with a humble mission and ends up creating a global photography community

REEL

Mikhail Red and his raw, unflinching brand of storytelling

Allow me to wax poetic about *Kanto's* beginnings.

It was 2015, roughly a month before my birthday, which by no coincidence also happens to be *Kanto's*, when the idea for a blog in the form of an online collaborative journal came to mind. I started out excited and giddy over all the possibilities until the time came to bring the idea to fruition. During the production of the journal, I found myself constantly pummeled with doubts and fears: I was too afraid to contact people I wanted to feature for fear of rejection, too insecure about the art direction and approach I wanted to take, and just a little bit overwhelmed with the amount of work (and hats I have to wear as both editor and creative director) to make it happen. There were many points when I just wanted to “stop this nonsense”, and move on.

Needless to say, I got over the dread, and here we are still standing and constantly growing, two years from that fateful day in September.

This issue's theme hits close to home.

Revolutions, trends, organizations, countries, technologies and causes—they have one thing in common. Someone *dared*. Someone dared to make things happen. Someone dared to cross the bridge of doubt; someone dared to surmount societal standards and norms in order to make their voices heard, their views communicated.

And they had *courage* to keep them going.

Courage doesn't always manifest in big things. Sometimes, it comes in the small changes we make to make our and others' lives better. Today when I look back to the many moments of doubt I had producing *Kanto* No. 1, I feel proud of what we've achieved. *Kanto* has grown to become more than just a one-man show into a global effort that connects creatives by celebrating the many ways creativity has made and is making the world a better place. And it all started with that one decision to take the leap, and as our main cover line goes, make a splash.

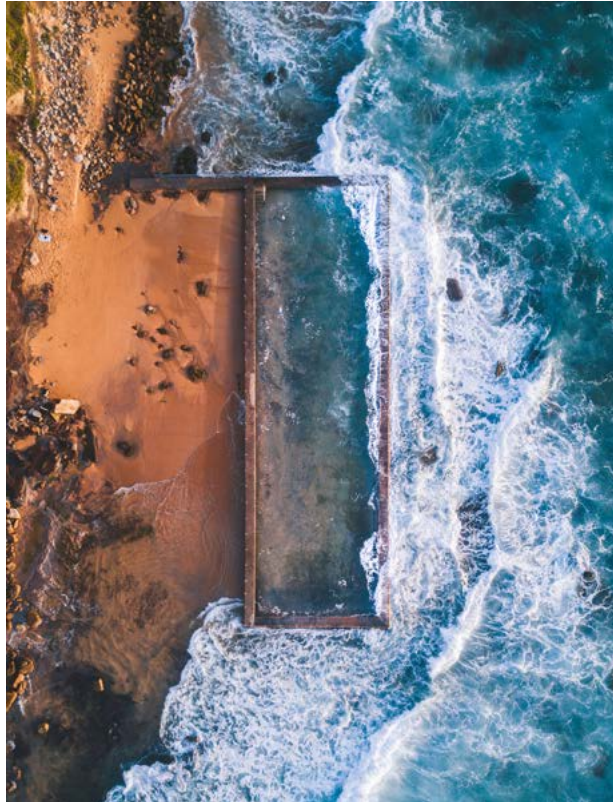
Now, speaking of changes, *Kanto* is undergoing a few starting with this issue. For one, *Kanto* will now come in a leaner, more feature-packed format of 96 pages per issue, and will be released five times a year. Me and my awesome managing editor Danielle Austria, an indispensable fixture in *Kanto* for the past few issues (and future issues to come!), are also hard at work on a brand new website coming next year, complementing the journal with exciting and thoughtful content. Lastly, *Kanto* will now be available in three of the biggest digital publication platforms for ease of access and download, namely Issuu, Joomag and Magzter.

Thanks again for being part of our two-year journey and hope that you'll join the ride in many more issues to come. Go make that splash and happy reading! ●



Patrick

@patrick_kasingsing



On the cover: Ocean pool, Australia
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Kanto

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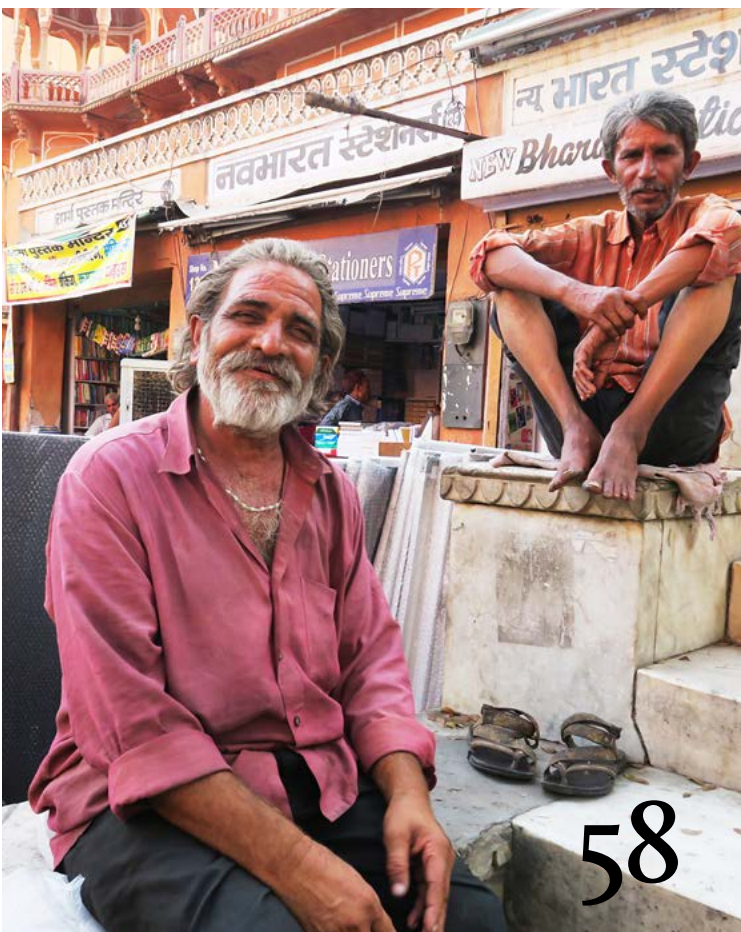
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Awesome People

WHO MADE THIS ISSUE POSSIBLE



Lester Babiera is a freelance photographer and multimedia producer. He loves to travel, seeking new experiences and memorable adventures. Recent explorations include backpacking in Southeast Asia and India. He is currently setting his sights on exploring East Asia. **What gives you courage?** The future.



Lawrence Carlos is currently an architectural writer for *BluPrint*, a Philippine title on architecture. Trained as an architect in the UK and Germany, his architectural photographs were featured in the RIBA London Awards and the Architects' Journal Small Projects Award. He is an avid vinyl record collector and has a penchant for film photography.



Celine Reyes is a wayfaring word-weaver whose stories have been featured in several notable publications. Her blog *Celineism* has been hailed as one of the Top 50 Blogs of the Philippines for 2017. She's obsessed with trees and natural landscapes, and dreams of planting her own forest. **What gives you courage?** I draw courage from dreams and from people who share the same ideals as I do.

Vida Cruz's stories have been published or are forthcoming in *Lontar: The Journal of Southeast Asian Speculative Fiction, Expanded Horizons*, and various anthologies. A first place winner of the 2017 Writers of the Future contest, she also attended the 2014 Clarion Writers Workshop. She likes giraffes and the color purple. **What gives you courage?** The thought that I can look back at this moment or experience and know that I will have no regrets.



Mikhail Plata is a visual effects artist and animator based in Manila. He specializes in creating corporate videos, advertisements, and motion graphics videos. When not at work, he likes to spend his time running tabletop role-playing games, collecting board games, designing his own games, or playing wizard with special effects. **What gives you courage?** The prospect of learning and growth. I feel courageous and more confident knowing that every pathway and roadblock I encounter will bring me somewhere, and that there is no possible decision or direction I could take that would not give me something new to learn about the world or myself.



Eldry John Infante is an architecture student from Pampanga, Philippines. He is a photography enthusiast, designer, illustrator and an avid fan of all things Japanese. **What gives you courage?** To know the possibilities of life; to know that there are people who appreciate you whatever you do, and to know that the universe can conspire to help you achieve your aspirations.



Kara Gonzales is a designer, stylist, artist, mental health advocate and dog lover still figuring out what to do with her life. If you're in a similar situation, she wants you to know that you're not alone. She's always up for coffee conversations; hit her up if you need one. **What gives you courage?** That would be a "who." Diane.



Miguel Llona is a freelance writer and the former managing editor of *BluPrint* magazine. If a genie grants him three wishes, he'll (stupidly) wish for a healing ability, an adamantium-laced skeleton and retractable claws.

Timothy Percival is a London-based multidisciplinary artist. Earlier this year, he completed a solo exhibition of paintings in East London and will be releasing his latest book *An Epitaph for Seven Years in Exile* on shelves this summer. **What gives you courage?** The idea that I'm responsible for my own actions. Wishing to be the best person I can be gives me great courage to truly act well.



Mikhail Lecaros is the editor-in-chief of pop culture hub *Sabaw.PH*, and a freelance movie writer who has a love-hate relationship with cold showers. **What gives you courage?** Is there any catalyst for courage more metaphorically potent than a cold shower at the beginning of the day? Standing there, barely awake and vulnerable, you are confronted with the harsh reality that even if you may not particularly enjoy what comes next, it is an obstacle that must nevertheless be overcome. And when those first arctic jolts rend the remnants of slumber into unwilling alertness, you may derive some satisfaction from the knowledge that, whatever the day brings, you'll be more than ready for it. After all, you already cleared one hurdle before breakfast. Anything after that's gonna be easy.





ANGLES

Spatial Stories





Architectural photographer
Laurian Ghinitoiu drops
the corporate path for a life
behind the lens

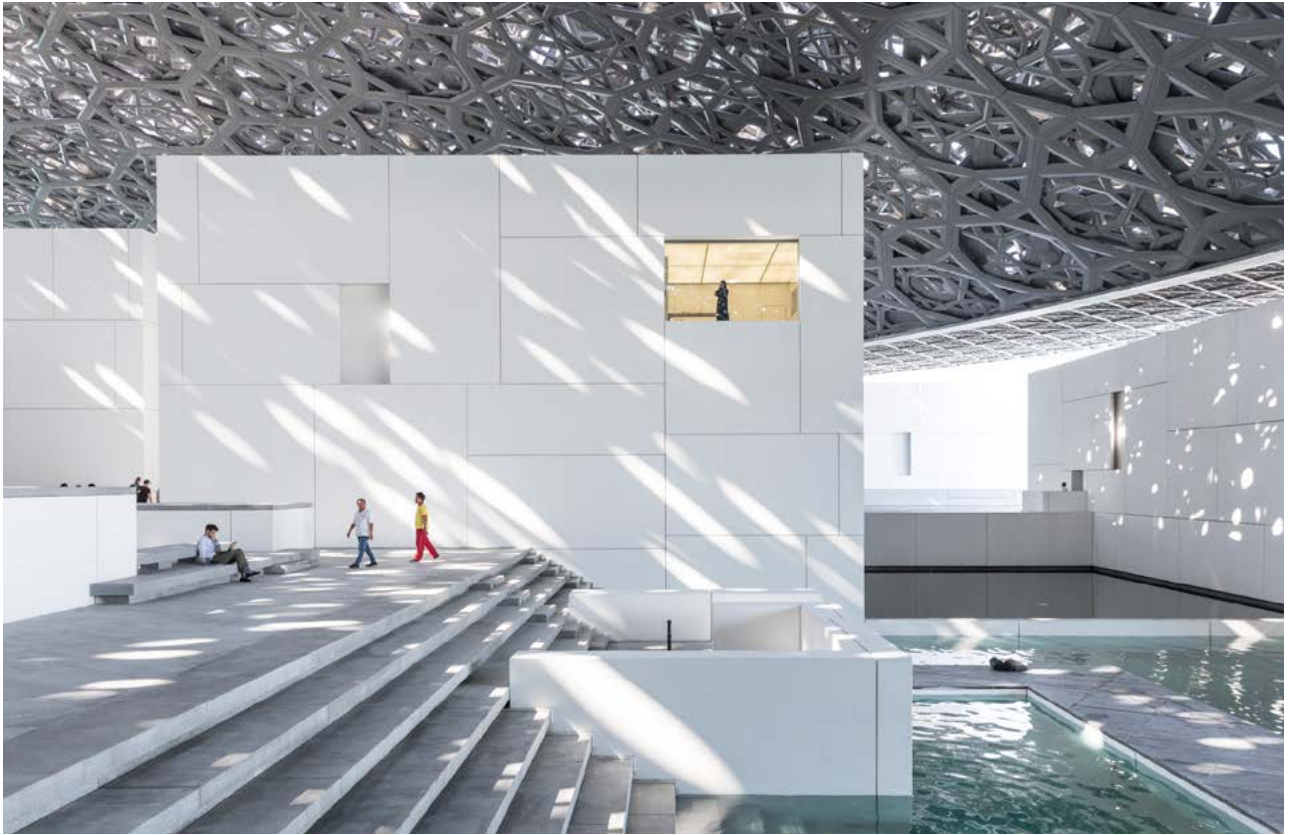
INTERVIEW *Lawrence Carlos*

VIA 57 West, New York City, USA by BIG

I met Laurian Ghinitoiu in 2013 through a friend while they were studying at the Dessau Institute of Architecture (DIA) at the historic Bauhaus building in Dessau, Germany. Having both made the leap into freelancing as photographers at the same time, it has been fascinating following Laurian's path, which has led him to be commissioned to photograph architecture designed by the biggest international firms and publications. In this interview, I ask Laurian to reflect on his meandering journey as an architectural photographer, his approach to photographing high profile buildings, and what he believes his photography says about the built environment.

Self-portrait, Louvre Abu Dhabi





Hello! Please introduce yourself.

Louvre Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE
by Jean Nouvel

My name is Laurian Ghinitoiu and I'm from Romania. I studied a Masters in architecture at the DIA in Dessau, Germany. I moved to Berlin four years ago and worked in an architecture firm for a year. Since then, for two years and three months, I've been traveling the world, using photography as a tool to document the built environment.

Previously, you trained as an architect. What made you decide to become an architectural photographer?

It wasn't a planned decision at all. Within the space of a week I found out that I wouldn't be working at the firm I was employed at, and at the same time I got an email from Wolfgang Buttress, designer of the UK Pavilion at Expo 2015 in Milan, who said, "Good morning Laurian, we just saw your photos! They are very beautiful! We already have a lot of images, but yours are special."

I was drawn into the unknown. I could have easily turned away, but I decided to take the risk and look for my own way out. What seemed very scary at the beginning transformed into a way of living, which suited me very well—a camera, a backpack, and continuous traveling.

“I am very conscious that I possess a very powerful tool, which can have a huge impact regarding issues around the built environment.”

What were some of your biggest doubts when you made this career move?

Despite having switched over two years ago, I still consider myself in transition. I still have plenty of doubts but they are more focused now. At the beginning, I didn't know the basics related to the profession itself such as copyright, usage, finances, and technical issues, but also about style, influences and approach.

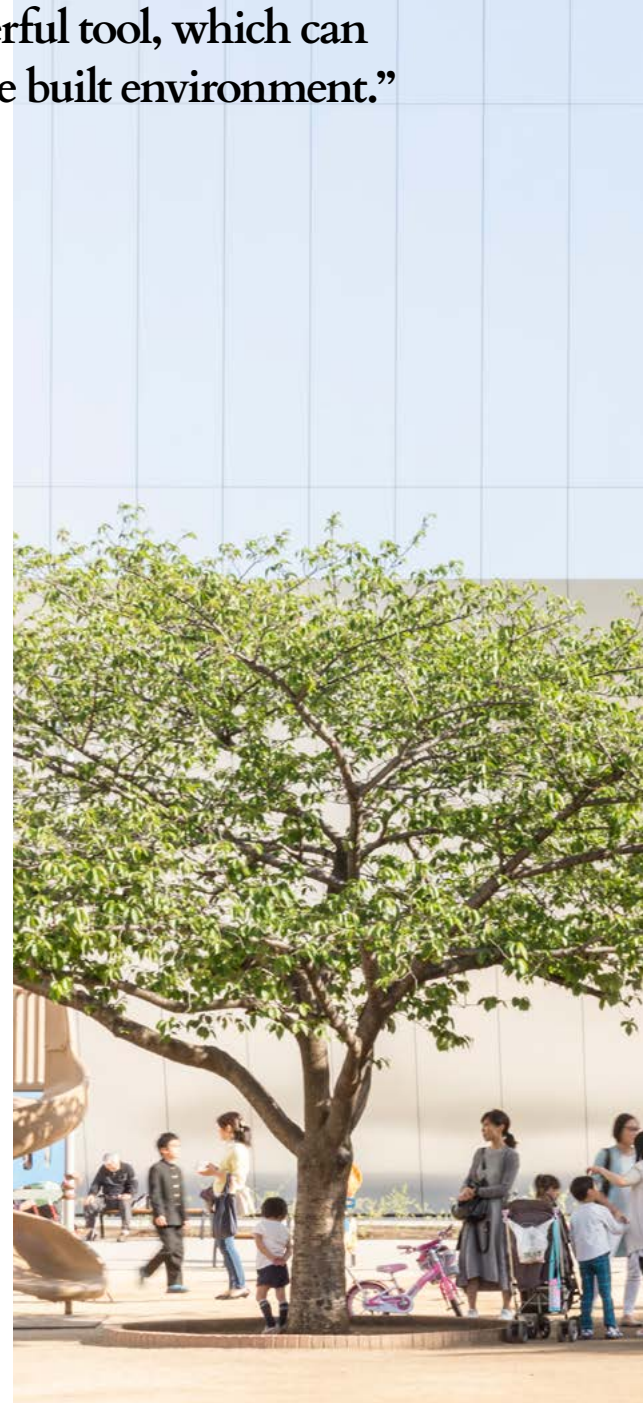
Now, I am very conscious that I possess a very powerful tool, which can have a huge impact regarding issues around the built environment. My doubts transformed into questions and are now focused on the visual outcome, on the stories around the architecture I want to tell, and the long-term photography projects I want to build.

A career as a photographer can be a challenging path, especially given the solitary nature of the work. What gives you the motivation to continue along this path?

As with architecture, I believe that being a photographer is a profession that has to melt with your life. In my case, it became a way of living and part of the motivation is that fraction of a second which drives you to click the shutter. Capturing the subject or not is secondary. No matter how long you plan and prepare for it, you will always be surprised and discover something new. Without fail, something will inspire you or, on the contrary, will mess everything up. Stepping back, it's about this collection of captured moments, which can tell a story about the built environment in all its layers.

Given that more people than ever are taking and sharing photos of architecture—both non-professionals and professionals alike—what is your particular approach to architectural photography?

I would say that I have a journalistic approach, with architecture as a backdrop, and the main subject being the stories around it. In order to capture all these very unique and sincere moments, I try to be as invisible as possible—this is one reason why I rarely use a tripod—which allows me to be very alert and dynamic. I mostly focus on public spaces where there is always something happening and, thus, I can be spontaneous and responsive to what's going on.





Sumida Hokusai Museum, Tokyo, Japan by Kazuyo Sejima



Museo Internacional del Barroco,
Puebla, Mexico by Toyo Ito & Associates
Opposite page, from top: Tate Modern,
London, UK by Herzog & De Meuron;
Forest of Light, Milan, Italy by Sou Fujimoto



I'm always seeking to understand a building as a whole, from its contextual scale to how people interact in and around it. I try to document the activity as authentically as possible, while always remaining objective towards the architecture.

You have either taken it upon yourself or have been commissioned to photograph buildings across the world, designed by some of the most well-known architectural firms, such as BIG, SANAA and Foster + Partners, and also old masters such as Louis Kahn, Luis Barragan, and Le Corbusier. What have you learned from traveling to see these buildings that you would not have learned if you were only practicing as an architect?

Now, I feel connected to architecture more than ever before. As I take my time to do a lot of research about a building, once I'm on location I feel very connected with it. For two to three days I slowly discover and understand each corner and gesture. I understand what

works and also what doesn't. I can feel its materiality and the behavior around it. I am able to gain all these amazing insights, which I will use, sooner or later, once I am involved in a design process again.

Do you feel that taking and studying architectural photographs is underused in the design process, especially because we judge most architecture nowadays through the mediated image?

I believe that the actual architecture is sometimes far from photos, for better or for worse. As architects we frame—first, through visualization and, later, through photos—the architecture object in a way that it will give the story we want it to tell, which is sometimes not complete.

Photography should be independent and not subordinated to architects, and if used properly, can definitely become an important tool in the design process.

“I never set up my scenes. I'm always seeking to understand a building as a whole, from its contextual scale to how people interact in and around it.”

“I consider the personal experience a very good method to grasp the sense of place through my own understanding.”

Fosun Foundation, Shanghai, China by Studio Heatherwick and Foster+Partners





What is the process like for you in trying to be the first to photograph a high profile building?

Whether high profile or not, I've been disappointed on many occasions when I've visited an architecture project in real life because I was initially very impressed by the way it was photographed. I'm sure that I'm not the only one who has experienced this. But also the reverse happens, when I've seen photos that couldn't capture the essence of a building.

Even if I know the projects mainly from the design process, or from pre-visualization, I consider the personal experience a very good method to grasp the sense of place through my own understanding. By doing this, my approach does not change with the photos selected by the architect for their own purposes.

What do you make of the response when your photographs of a project are some of the first images to be published and shared on websites like Dezeen, ArchDaily, and designboom?

As more people know my work, it certainly gives me more opportunities, which helps me to expand my travels. It allows me to establish myself as a global photographer and reach any corner of the world to be able to build my personal projects. As most of the feedback I get is positive, it will certainly give me more energy to continue to do what I do.

Where do you see yourself going with your architectural photography?

It's clear to me that photography is a very powerful tool to convey stories about the built environment at an urban level but also at a very human and emotional scale. By contextualizing peoples' emotions, interactions and inhabitation with formal or informal architecture through photography, I believe this process will become useful in shaping my approach towards architectural design if I find myself at an office desk again.

Aside from this, I have already begun teaching a series of photography workshops in architectural schools, which entails students researching about the built environment.

I will continue to visit and photograph well-known examples of architecture, although I will always try to discover and encourage young, skilled architects. Last, but not the least, I'll definitely focus more on pursuing and developing my personal photographic projects. ●

Follow Laurian Ghinitoiu on Instagram [@laurianghinitoiu](#) and view his photography portfolio at [laurianghinitoiu.com](#). Follow Lawrence Carlos on Instagram [@_lawrencecarlos](#).





ANGLES

ELECTRIC DREAMS

Architectural visualization studio *Luxigon*
injects just the right amount of fun and mischief into
visuals that crackle with energy and activity

INTERVIEW *Patrick Kasingsing*



Hello! Please introduce yourselves.

Luxigon Paris (LP): Hello, I'm Eric de Broche des Combes, founder of Luxigon, one of the first rendering companies in the world entirely dedicated to competitions and mayhem.

Luxigon Los Angeles (LLA): Hello there. My name is Juanito Olivarria, founding partner of the Los Angeles-based arm of the visualization studio, Luxigon.

Could you give us a brief background of how Luxigon started? Where were you before Luxigon, and what made you take the leap into architectural visualization?

LP: Laurent Théaux and I, who founded Luxigon in 2007, already had a serious background in the field of architecture. I started doing images during my studies at Ecole d'architecture de Marseille. I then moved to Paris in 1999 and met Laurent Théaux. Together we founded Auralab, our first studio dedicated to architectural visualization.

Christiansholm masterplan, COBE

LLA: I don't think the jump into the field of architecture visualization was ever a big one for me. It felt like a natural progression with all my interests and choices in life pointing me in the direction of visuals. The architectural interest happened much later. Rather, I didn't realize until later on how much of an influence architecture had on those feelings and memories.

The studio has a vibrant, cinematic approach in its presentation of architecture. What inspires such an aesthetic and why pursue this direction?

LP: We reject the idea of a dry hypothetical context, preferring to put unpretentiously presented buildings into expressionist sets that would not be out of place in movies or comic-book thrillers. We generally share a lot of cultural references. Most of us love Kubrick, *Blade Runner*, whisky, coffee, cigarettes, Helvetica Neue, DIN, Wagner and dead architects.

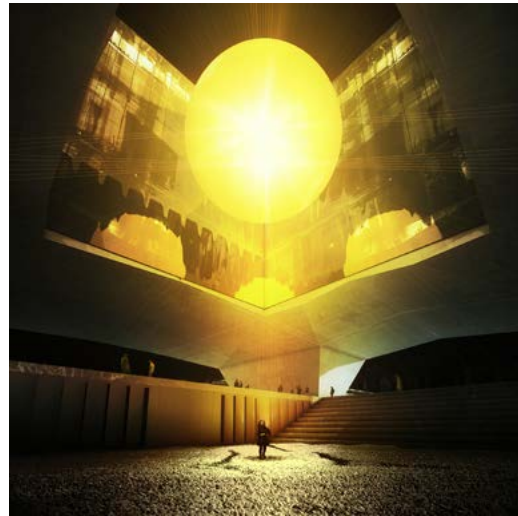
My personal favourites are Brueghel (paintings telling stories), Hieronymus Bosch (paintings telling weird stories), Rembrandt (telling stories through the darkness), Gerhard Richter (telling blurry stories), Julius Shulman (telling organised stories), Mies van der Rohe (less is more) and Douglas Trumbull, the one responsible for the special effects of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Blade Runner*.

LLA: In general, I think it's just an honest representation of who we are at Luxigon. I mean that in almost every sense of the word. Honest. We aren't just doing dramatic skies and "gothic" atmospheres because it looks romantic. Hell yeah, it makes the project stand out and therefore the images, but we have always had the mentality of doing things differently. At the time I started doing visualizations, the tide was changing but the end result was still the same.

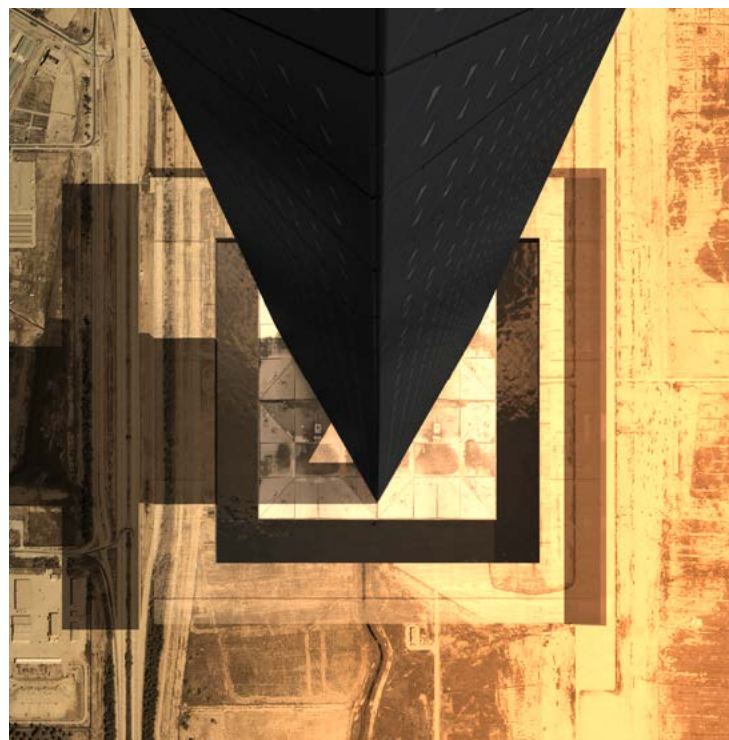
I was tired of seeing pale images populated by stale businessmen in freshly-pressed suits, all smiling, holding hands and drinking coffee. I learned from my internship in Luxigon's Paris office that every detail mattered. In order to create nice imagery not only do you have to insert a bit of yourself into the picture, but you must also go beyond the brief.

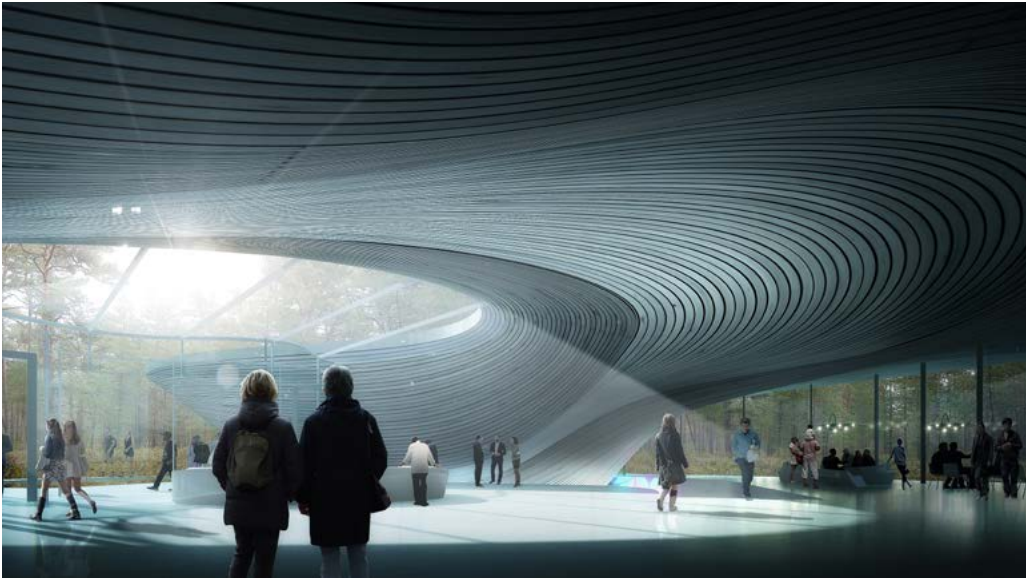
Whereas there is a tendency for a lot of architectural visualizers to prioritise realism in their work, your team goes beyond by adding story. Why so?

LP: We are French. French people love good drama and revolutions. There is also a culture of arts and art is made mostly of immediacy; this is something that we can achieve by working by hand. Computers have no feelings, we do.



Milan Exhibition, Eric de Broches des Combes
Below: Iron Resort





Flying Garden Tower, COOP Himmelb(l)au
Below: Equator Tower, REX

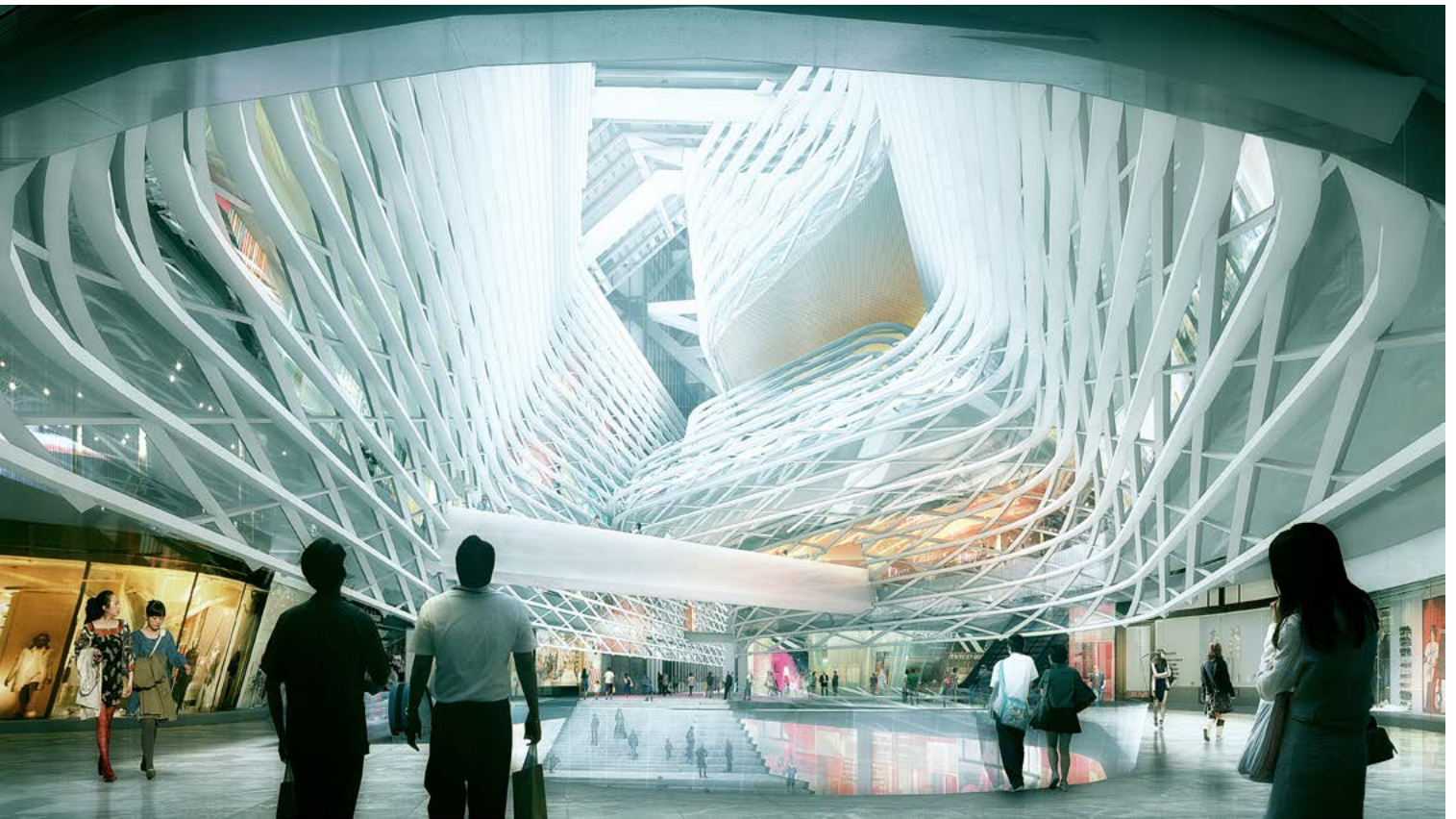
Your studio works for some of the world's biggest and most renowned architectural practices. And it is natural for some clients to already have a vision they would like to push that does not always coincide with the studio's philosophy and direction. How do you respond?

LP: It is both unfortunate and necessary. Unfortunate because often we are unable to demonstrate the knowledge we have. Necessary because there are no better ways of learning new practices.



LLA: It really comes down to respect and integrity. For some of the big hitters to come to us in the first place when they can choose any one of the thousands of rendering firms out there, that already points to a type of silent, mutual agreement between a client and supplier for the project's execution (or because it's extremely last minute and everyone else is full).

But really, we like to be as upfront as possible with everything—from camera selections to time of day and lighting. And when we can tell that a certain project, or that one or two images in that set, is going down the path of failure, we try our hardest to remind the client why they sought us out in the first place. In worst case scenarios, when the decision for the final vision is not up to the Rem's of the world but rather to the client's client, we politely suggest that they find someone else who is willing to accommodate that type of image. No hard feelings, but it's better that someone else comes up with a bad image and get praise by their client's client than us still doing it our way and not get paid.



“In order to create nice imagery not only do you have to insert a bit of yourself into the picture, but you must also go beyond the brief.”



Lucas Museum, Paul Andreu

Above: Hanking Center Tower, Morphosis

“Rendering is a martial art. It is a combination of grandiosity and meaningful tasks. You have to be in control.”

How is a starting creative to stand out in the increasingly competitive world of CGI and 3D modeling and animation? What advice would you give to creatives who aspire towards a similar career path such as yours?

LP: Regularity. Regularity is the most complicated discipline. Rendering is a martial art. It is a combination of grandiosity and meaningful tasks. You have to be in control; you have to keep under control a million of different streams and only when they are all properly conducted can you handle a good image. Having a bottle of whisky under your desk can certainly help to keep the spirits high.

LLA: Have fun in every way possible. Be a bit bohemian at times when faced with a very serious client. Of course always test the waters first, but if you do good work, the work will speak for itself and comfort them in a way that allows them to relax a bit, enabling you to send a

nodding jack_nicholson-shining.gif instead of a “Sure thing. We will send the next round asap...thank you!” response to an email. In general, I think most people are bored, so it’s the small, unexpected things that make the day-to-day exciting.

What is the studio's dream gig or client? Have you landed it yet?

LP: We work with the best architects in the world. What we are learning is invaluable. As long as we keep improving, we get closer to a goal that is still undefined.

LLA: On our first year of operations, we did a project for Morphosis and the images turned out to be our favorite, and theirs as well. They won the competition for the project and used it in their anniversary book, even making stamps with our images for their office. You know you've made it when you have your image as a stamp. ●

Obama Presidential Center proposal, Snøhetta



Washington housing project,
Marlon Blackwell Architects
Below: Basel Crematorium,
Chad Oppenheim



See more of Luxigon's architectural visualization portfolio at luxigon.com

ANGLES

All Natural





In a cold and calculating CGI industry, Norwegian studio *MIR* brings a much-needed human touch to architectural visualization

INTERVIEW *Patrick Kasingsing*





Hello! Please introduce yourselves.

Hi! We are Trond and Mats, founders of MIR, a studio that provides imagery of unbuilt architecture. We have been doing so since the year 2000. We'd like to think of ourselves as active contributors of the projects we choose to be involved in. This means we do not only produce off-the-shelf renderings but attempt to challenge, interact and educate our clients' views of the field.

You have a 'natural' and painterly approach in your presentation of architecture; every render is brimming with stories to tell, often in the context of grey skies and tranquil scenery rendered with a saturated color palette. What inspired the trademark 'MIR' aesthetic?

We are equal parts praised and called out for the grey, fog-enshrouded visualizations we do of buildings. However it is an inaccurate view of our work, as you can find in our [website](#). What most likely made our viewers associate our work with such a look is that such a moody, mysterious approach to architectural rendering was previously unheard of. I mean, how can one possibly inspire people with misty grey scenes? Don't we need blue skies, green trees, and lots and lots of happy faces in our renderings?

Above: The MIR team, lead by Trond Greve and Mats Andersen (front), photographed by Knut Åserud

Opposite page: Chartres roadside stop canopy, Kengo Kuma



“People have to realize that renderings do not portray reality.”

We always treat each project with respect to its surroundings. That has a lot to do with the colors, weather and context. The result is a great variance of image concepts aside from the same tired, ordinary recipe that sadly many architects ascribe to.

Another reason for the distinctive look that our renderings possess is that we utilize a non-3D technique referred to as matte painting. Like a collage, we put together a multitude of images and 3D layers many times over that we eventually achieve a softer and naturalistic (not photorealistic), painterly look. Not many people within the field can do this.

The issue of accuracy as depicted in architectural visualizations has always been a hot topic, with some built structures failing to equal its beauty as depicted in renderings. What is your take on this?

Yes it's an interesting debate. But it's also stupid. People have to realize that renderings do not portray reality. It's a two-dimensional composition that is ultimately a visual representation of an object in a very unique moment in time. We are used to being exposed to images like this in the marketing of other products, be it for cars, makeup, fashion, or product design in general. How often does your dull Jeep look like it does in the commercials crossing epic rivers in the Rocky Mountains?

Above: BIG, Nuuk Art Museum
Kyriakos Tsolakis Architects, Troodos Observatory





Icefjord Center, Dorte Mandrup Arkitekter **Top:** Table Cape, Silvester Fuller



“The images we make are more about the place than the building.”

When a building is physically changed to a different design than what it promised in the renderings, now that's a different story that the builders have to answer for. Our job is to pinpoint and hold up what we think are the strongest aspects of the architectural projects we take on.

The digital age has brought upon the popularity of CGI and 3D animation in various fields and in this burgeoning and competitive industry, what piece of advice would you give aspiring architectural visualizers who want to pursue a similar career path such as yours?

You need to learn to master other things than just 3D softwares. Use your mind and solve things in Photoshop—try out matte painting and train your eye instead of just letting the 3D software do all the work. It will look plastic. Learn to draw and paint with a pencil and brush. Study the visual world around you. Play with cameras. Do not be afraid to experiment and do things differently.

You work in the inspiring locale of Bergen, Norway, whose landscapes aren't far off from the beautiful settings in your renderings. How important is context and mood in the creation of the architectural image?

This is extremely important, absolutely one of the key ingredients of the architectural visualization “dish”. Living where we live gives us great visual input when it comes to weather, colors and lighting situations. In a normal day, we have fog, sun, snow, rain and epic sunsets. There are wet swamps, rocky hills, lakes, waterfalls, snowy peaks and dark forests—all 15 minutes away from the office. Context and mood is everything.

We often say that the images we make are more about the place than the building.

What is MIR's dream project? Have you landed it yet?

At first we dreamed about working with the big studios. After a while we discovered that it was not as rewarding as we envisioned. In the big studios, there are overarching hierarchies, and lots of opinions to juggle, mostly from people whom we are not very often able to talk to directly. This usually leads to a bad environment for creative work, and the process becomes rigid and tedious. No one is willing to take risks, so we then end up with “elevation music.”

We've also done projects where the clients are more open-minded and are interested in letting us add our own flavor or take on the project. It can be a humble cabin or a great castle—it doesn't matter.

We are currently involved in making a series of renderings of unbuilt architectural masterpieces of the last century. It will culminate into something big. It's all very inspiring and we are able to take more control

Speaking of inspiration, how does the team stay inspired? What activities and initiatives are implemented to keep your team refreshed and rejuvenated?

Good question. We try to go on trips, have social lives outside of work. We don't force our employees to work long hours and over weekends. We think everyone needs stimuli from hobbies and social lives apart from work. We also attend seminars, have nice lunches and loud conversations in the office, and on off days, we go on spa excursions. ●

See more of MIR's architectural visualization portfolio at mir.no

An aerial photograph of a beach with a yellow square icon above the text.

LENS

Against The Current

In a sea of uninspiring stock photography options, *Unsplash* upends the status quo and proves that the best things in life are indeed free

PHOTOGRAPHY

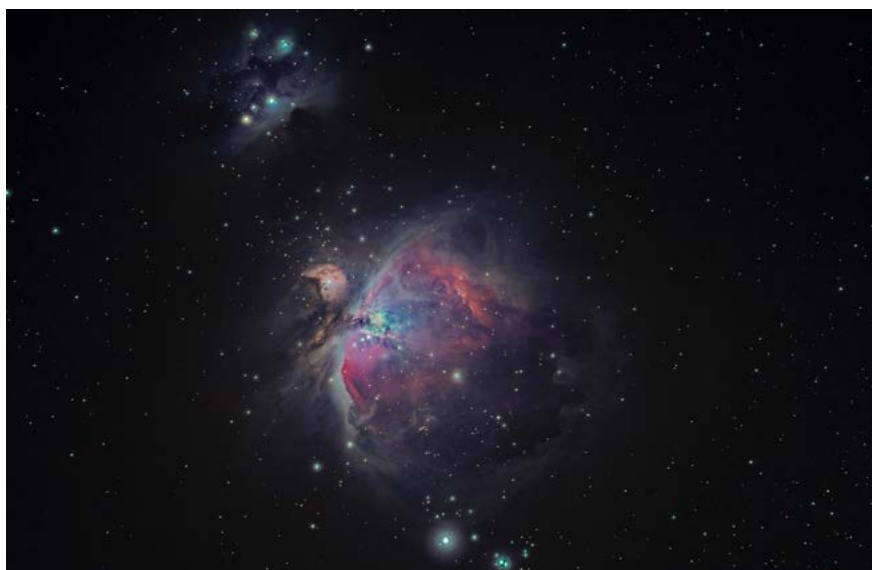
Andre Benz, Lachlan Dempsey,
Bryan Goff, Brooke Lark and Samuel Scrimshaw

INTERVIEW

Patrick Kasingsing







Hello! Please introduce yourself.

I'm Annie Spratt, contributor and community manager at Unsplash since January 2016. Part of the Unsplash team works remotely, and I am one of them—based in the United Kingdom (though I do visit and work with the rest of the team in Montréal, Canada a few times each year which is always nice!). My daily responsibilities include curating the photos submitted to Unsplash, handling support enquiries, talking with contributors and users, and working on special projects within the community.

How did Unsplash come about? Was there a particular need in the stock photography industry that led to its conception?

Unlike most big photography sites, Unsplash didn't begin as a startup with heady ambitions—it started as a Tumblr account with a simple premise: ten new curated photos every ten days, but with one super-special secret ingredient: every photo was 100% free to use.

Whilst starting out with our one-time parent company, Crew, which has since been acquired by Dribbble, we found that finding good stock photos was a problem. Stock photos are generally cheesy and slightly cringeworthy—certainly not the brand message that we wanted to portray to the world. We hired a local photographer to shoot a set of photos for us, and the photos that were left over we gave away on that Tumblr blog.

As it turns out, giving people the freedom to use beautiful photos for whatever they wanted was a great way to make those photos spread like wildfire. Unsplash is a humble side project that happened at the right time, fixing an issue that it turns out many people were having: sourcing decent free imagery.



Simone Hutsch [@heysupersimi](#)

Top: Bryan Goff [@bryangoffphoto](#)

Opposite page: Andre Benz [@trapnation](#)

How do you curate your photos? What makes a photo Unsplash-worthy?

One of the big differences between Unsplash and other free photo websites is that every single photo is reviewed by either myself or my fellow community manager Andrew Neel, who perform a number of checks on them before curating the best of those submitted photos to the New Feed and search function of the site. With an average of 1,200 photos submitted daily, the curation process normally takes around four hours every day.

I personally feel that the mark of a great photo is one that makes you gasp when you see it, or leaves one wondering more about the photo, the story behind it, how they took it, or the creative process behind it.

From a small collective, Unsplash has grown to become a global community of photographers. How do you feel about that, and what steps are your team taking to evolve?

Our team has always been relatively small, especially compared to some other companies and I'm really proud how we've handled our growth. From the number of accounts created and photos submitted to how we serve the photos to billions of people visiting Unsplash, to our free to use API. There's been a lot of logistical factors to consider not only as we grow but as we look ahead to future growth too. One of the co-founders of Unsplash, Luke Chesser, wrote a really insightful article about scaling Unsplash with a small team which you can read [here](#).

Let's backtrack. Tell us about your name. Why Unsplash?

Unsplash comes from an old school term: splash pages (the first landing or welcome page that you see when you visit a site). They usually had big background images.

Unsplash is a product of open global collaboration. How are you making sure that the community keeps growing and is constantly rewarded?

We try to connect as much as possible with our community and we believe that personal connections are key. We send personal emails to contributors, mail people handwritten postcards and celebrate photo milestones with them. We have offline events for people who want to meet up and connect with fellow Unsplashers in 'real life' and have a number of [Ambassadors](#) helping us make this happen. From time to time, we partner with brands on special projects which leads to some members of our community being paid for freelance work.

Any future plans you can share with us?

A full mobile app is in the pipeline. This is something that I'm very much looking forward to! ●

“The mark of a great photo is one that makes you gasp when you see it, or leaves one wondering more about the photo, the story behind it, how they took it, or the creative process behind it.”

Below: Samuel Scrimshaw [@samscrim](#)

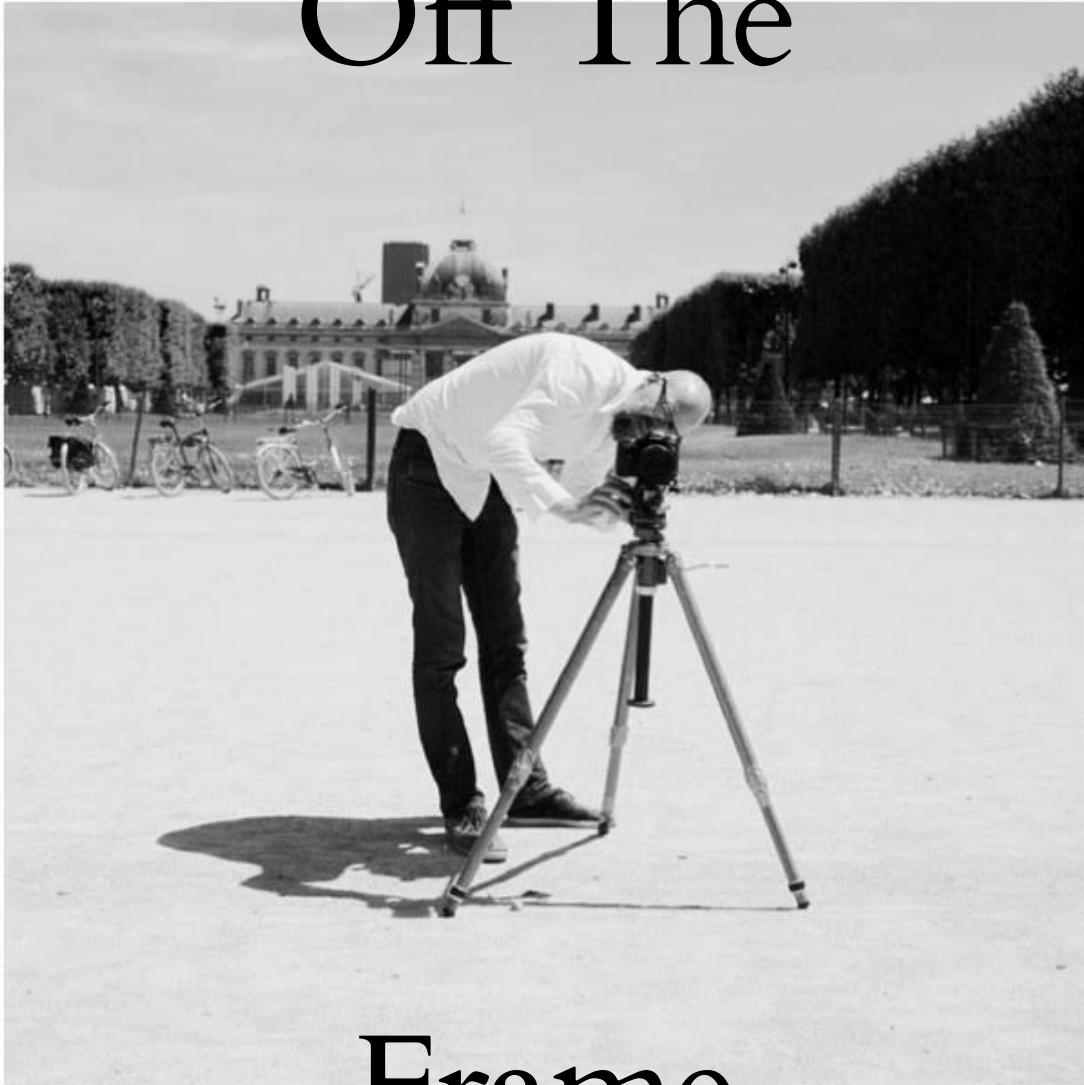
Bottom: The Unsplash team





LENS

Off The



Photographed by Maria de la Croix

Frame

Photographer-inventor *Per Cromwell*
on depicting life in and out of the picture

INTERVIEW *Patrick Kasingsing*



“The stories I want to tell don't need actors.”

Hello! Please introduce yourself.

I'm Per Cromwell. I build stuff. Sometimes in Sweden, more often elsewhere. I always bring my camera.

Your photography subjects range from people to places to nature. Out of the three, which do you feel most attracted to?

I'm strongly influenced by my father's work as a landscape photographer. He often worked in the context of dark forests, murky rivers and foreboding mountains and I followed him to Ireland, Denmark and the UK documenting landscapes. I guess it is just natural that I take after his approach and find attraction in this genre.

I don't confine myself to just landscape photography. I also find interest in depicting and documenting life in the city and other urban phenomena. I like to take my time with my subjects. And I don't like to direct people. I rarely interact with my subjects. People enter my photos most often by accident. The stories I want to tell don't need actors.

The images in your gallery are often accompanied by personal thoughts and anecdotes as captions. Do you find it easier to open up through Instagram than in any other medium?

I add captions in order to turn the pictures into personal memories or stories. I'm just as interested, or maybe more interested, in creating these fragmented scenes of daily life. Memories or reflections, relevant or irrelevant. The captions add a dimension which makes my creative process more interesting. Pure aesthetics don't interest me.

In comic books, all the movement and action takes place between the frames, in that white gap between the stills. This is where the real story is told. I'd like to see my photography in the same way; as stills. The real story takes place before or after I took the picture. Instagram's format makes it an effective medium to communicate my intentions, and is a channel where you can get away with short texts.

Photography can sometimes bring out the bolder side of photographers. What's the most dangerous situation or thing you did to capture a particular photo?

My work sometimes put me in potentially dangerous situations. The camera is usually part of my work as a designer and builder. For instance, documenting activist work inside the country of Belarus.



We were dropping teddy bears in parachutes over an air defense base in the capital Minsk. I was on the ground to film when we were illegally flying over the stronghold of the last dictatorship in Europe. A few generals got fired as a result of the stunt. And I think a minister of defense lost his job. Which led to me being chased by the KGB and receiving death threats. My work has also brought me to Zimbabwe, illegally filming inside Harare when making a project mocking the dictator Robert Mugabe. In these dire situations, getting caught was, naturally, not an option.

In comparison, getting arrested in Brussels for an art installation I produced and documented is a walk in the park. But it's impossible to know and predict really. I've experienced hostile situations in a lot of places, from Johannesburg to my own small hometown. I think in general we have much larger safety margins than we think.

What valuable life insights has photography taught you?

That the way you look makes all the difference. Everything can become a great picture approached the right way. As a boy, I was told about the work of this photographer whose name I have forgotten; all he did was take pictures of his garden his entire life. Magnificent pictures. Sometimes it's harder to look carefully at what surrounds you. If anything, photography has taught me that life contains much more beauty than what is sometimes obvious.

What does photography do for you, and where do you intend to take it in the future?

It's my preferred way to tell stories. And I can't imagine a life without stories. For me stories can be very fragmented, a short scene or a situation, a vague memory, something that may be hardly visible but still able to provoke feelings.

Not unlike Japanese stone gardens, stories can be expanded far beyond what's visible or told. I need to document and formulate them in order not to forget. People sometimes tell me of things I've been part of which I can hardly remember. But when I carry my camera my vision is changed; I remember things in a different way.

I don't really need to take photos; just bringing the camera sharpens my senses and makes me remember the smallest details. And when looking at the pictures in

retrospect, I can replay scenes in great detail. So in one sense, photography is a quite personal approach to not love in oblivion. I will keep recording these memories, fragments of scenes, stories and situations. Some I will keep sharing, some I'll keep for myself.

In this age of rapid digital consumption, would you say there's still space for quiet introspection and emotional exploration?

I'm pretty biased here. The entry of new layers, methods and approaches to digital consumption will, with absolute certainty, change what's relevant from a reader's perspective. But people seem to show no decline in consuming stories, and people will keep wanting different kinds of stories. It's like the keys of a piano. We need the full spectrum. It's always been like that, from Homer to Shakespeare. At no point in history has only one kind of story been in demand. A world consisting only of punch lines and memes would be intolerable. Now, as well as in the future. ●





“If anything, photography has taught me that life contains much more beauty than what is sometimes obvious.”



CREATIVE CORNER N° 2

Timothy Percival

I often find myself working on a few projects in parallel, so I make an effort to keep a clear desk. My iPad will be close by; otherwise only the tools needed for the task are at hand, namely fine line pens, tracing paper, photographs to work from, and most importantly, a lot of light. ●

Timothy's latest book *An Epitaph for Seven Years in Exile* is now available to buy online at epitaphforsevenyears.com. Don't forget to follow his work on Instagram [@percivalstudio](https://www.instagram.com/percivalstudio).

CANVAS

OPEN



SECRET

Artist Terence Eduarte spills the secrets of a hundred strangers in his latest art project

INTERVIEW *Patrick Kasingsing*

Hello! Please introduce yourself.

Hello! I'm Terence. I'm currently the Head of Design at Nuworks Interactive. I'm also an illustrator and a member of YCN, a creative talent agency in the UK.

What got you into illustration?

At first, it was just a hobby. I used to illustrate my favorite video game and TV characters for fun. I only knew illustration can be profitable once I got my first editorial illustration gig for *Rogue* magazine.

You've just finished running a fascinating series of illustrated portraits entitled *100 Days of Secrets* that sought to become an outlet for anonymous individuals to let out their deepest, darkest secrets.

What inspired this initiative?

A friend told me about Elle Luna's *#100DayProject*. It was my first time to participate in a daily illustration project. I knew I wanted to do portraits of people, but I also wanted each portrait to have a story.

Tell us about your process. How difficult was it to get material for 100 Days? What other challenges did you face creating the project?

I got secrets from all over the world. It was quite overwhelming at first but I tried my best to respond to every email and message. There were times that it got tough. It was hard to absorb all the emotion that everyone was pouring out. It was also hard to see the disappointment of those whose secrets weren't included in the project.

DAY 57

“One day, I came home from the university and my mother told me to cover up my legs in front of my friends. She didn't want them to realize I had gained weight and she said she was just protecting me from gossip. The comment didn't leave my mind and I've been bulimic ever since.”





Clockwise, from top left: Day 15 “I like playing with other people’s feelings because I am unsure about mine.” Day 28 “I created an imaginary friend as a coping mechanism for my depression. Now I want to make her disappear but she keeps coming back.” Day 42 “It was my 28th birthday last week and no one remembered it. Not a single call or text from my friends and family. So I woke up the next day, sat outside my house and cried quietly. My dog came and started crying too. It was the most beautiful thing someone has ever done for me.” Day 34 “I got drugged and raped by someone I knew and can’t get myself to tell anyone for fear of victim blaming. But on most days, I can’t help but victim blame myself.”



“The project gave me a whole new perspective in life. Knowing other people's struggles and experiences in life made me reflect on my own life in some way.”



Tell us about the execution and the style used to depict the subjects. How did you decide on the style?

Most people are ashamed to share their secrets. The style of the portraits is distinct to the owner of the secret, yet anonymous to everyone else.

What is your intended goal for the project beyond the exhibit? What insights and realizations do you want your viewers to grasp after seeing your artworks?

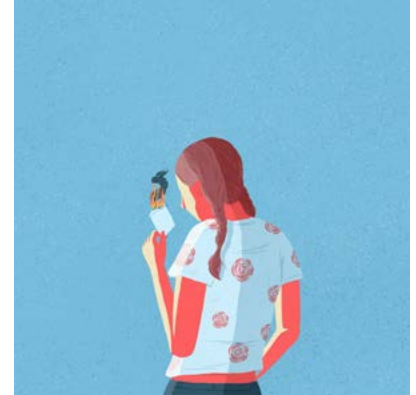
The project gave me a whole new perspective in life. Knowing other people's struggles and experiences in life made me reflect on my own life in some way. You are not alone.

The project tackles the issue of anonymity and how it helps people communicate what they would otherwise keep to themselves for fear of judgment and conflict. After releasing their secrets in the cloak of anonymity, what would you say is the next step? What are the pros and cons to anonymity, and how does your project reflect this?

A lot of people who sent a secret kept it to themselves for so long. I think the project became an outlet for people to let out thoughts and feelings they normally wouldn't tell anyone. A lot of secrets I got came from different parts of the world. I think the idea of sharing your secret to a person miles away from you is quite liberating. ●

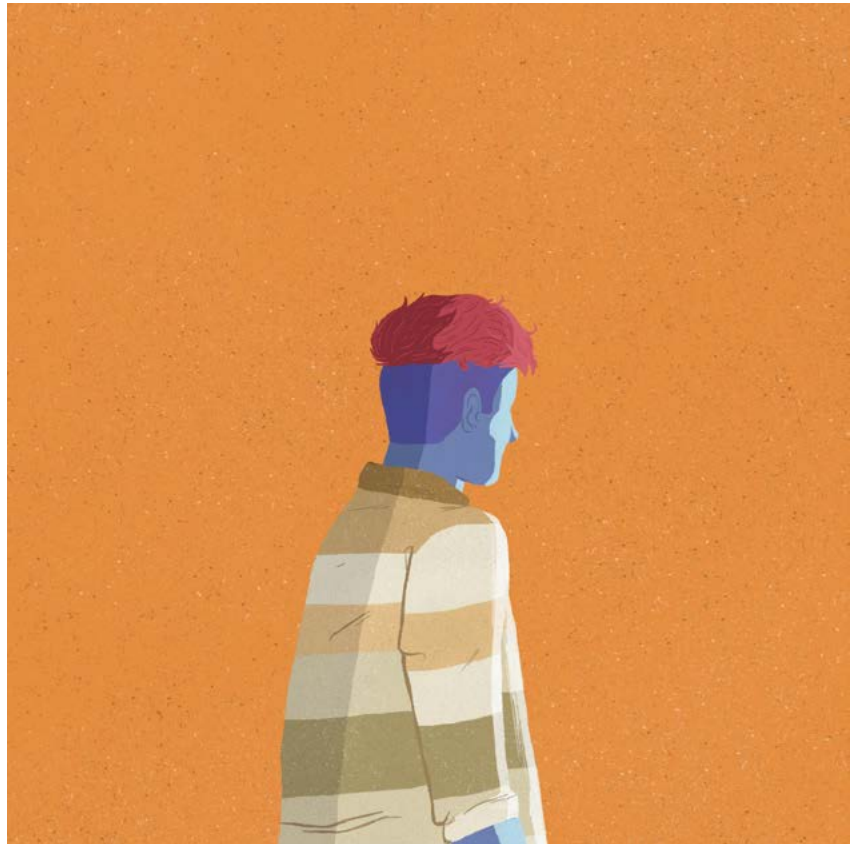
From top: Day 61 “I’ve cheated on quite a few guys. And now that I’ve found the love of my life, he wasn’t ready for me. He was seeing me while he was seeing his ex. If there’s any way to portray Karma in its purest, most painful and justified form, this is it.” **Day 66** “I haven’t been posting any photo with my face on it since last year. I feel better than ever.”

From left: Day 80 “I like to think the best of people but I actually think most humans are terrible.” **Day 94** “I burned the suicide note I wrote a month ago. Today is a good day.”



DAY 100

“I wrote letters to my girlfriend everyday. Everyday until her lung cancer took her away from me.”



View the entire illustration series and its accompanying 'secrets' on trnz.co/100-days-of-secrets



ON FIVE

Rafael Yap Gatus

Art is both escape
and refuge for this
Philippine-based
architect-illustrator

INTERVIEW *Patrick Kasingsing*

Tell us something about yourself.

Hello. I'm Rafael, an architect by profession and an artist by birth.

Your illustration work is a fascinating exploration of emotion and daily struggle. What inspires you to draw?

Most of my artworks are born out of my emotions. They are honest, intimate expressions of what I really feel. Naturally, they are often emotionally-charged, created to elicit or provoke its viewers to introspection.

I grew up coping with depression and I consider illustration an emotional outlet, an indispensable part of the healing process. It's also a creative diversion by helping me 'take my mind off my mind' whenever I need to.

What are your favorite illustration subjects? Why these in particular?

I really don't have a particular subject that I'm fond of depicting. Ever since I delved into illustration, I've been in a constant transition and exploration of styles, momentarily pausing on particular phases that interest me before I move on again. I remember experimenting with hazy silhouettes, pixelated faces, moving images and *Artidote*-type artworks in the past.



Opposite page, from top: *Detachment*, mixed media; *Was Up All Night*, mixed media

**“Most of my artworks are born out of my emotions.
They are honest, intimate expressions of what I really feel.”**

Lately, I am obsessed with composing unfinished sketches of faces and botanical elements pulled out from my old sketchbooks into artworks. I find the process rather nostalgic; this approach enables the depiction of expressive narratives with mundane and minimal elements, something I've always wanted to achieve. I guess in broad strokes, my favorite subject is really myself; the artworks I do are 'self-portraits' of my continuing foray into the concepts of confinement, isolation and longing.

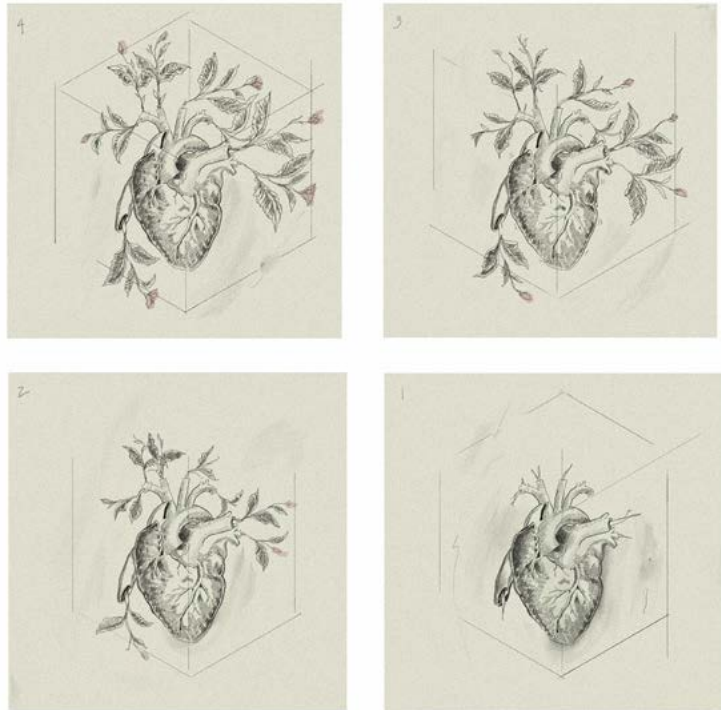
Describe your ideal drawing place.

My ideal drawing place would be at a seaside cottage near Bathurst Point lighthouse in Rottnest Island, West Australia. It's also my dream home. I have always fantasized about living in a beach house, with my studio oriented towards the sea. There would be drips of paint all over the wooden floors and stacked frames and canvases on a corner. I imagine it to be a place that I can relax and be carefree.

*Contraction series,
graphite on paper*

Tell us about the bravest thing you did.

This is a tough one. I feel unease whenever I talk about my depression, but I feel compelled to share two noteworthy points in my life where I decided to be brave. First was when I decided to take up architecture in college despite my health condition. I didn't know how things would work out back then but I forged on anyway. The second was when I finally gathered up the courage to admit to my parents that I needed help after I tried to take my life one week before my birthday. These were the instances that required a lot of courage on my part; the decision to face my fears and acknowledging my weaknesses has irrevocably changed me. I've never felt any braver. ●



More of Rafael's artworks on Instagram [@rafaelyapq](https://www.instagram.com/rafaelyapq)

Dreams are the subconscious's way of communicating with us, showing us impressions of our buried wishes and deepest desires. One could say they offer a window to our real selves—if such a thing even exists.

This is the question confronted by *Through the Looking Glass*, an exhibit born from the collaboration between artist Bettina Silverio and writer Miguel Llona. Being influenced and inspired by each other's work, the two created abstract art and stories that reflect the highs, lows, and fears that accompany one's search for identity and meaning. These come together as installation art and interactive pieces, with the aim of immersing visitors in a surreal setting that mimics the subconscious. Further adding whimsy to the gallery space are furniture pieces from Leklek Nacional. The result is an exhibit that “mirrors the state of flux we go through during the process of finding ourselves.” The following pages offer a glimpse into the exhibit with two paired works from the artists. ●

CANVAS + QUILL

The Curiosity of Me

In “Through the Looking Glass,”
Bettina Silverio and *Miguel Llona*
explore the dips and shifts that come
with finding oneself



To Where You Are, 18 x 24 in., mixed media on canvas

AN EXCERPT FROM

Bloom

STORY *Miguel Llona*

The room is filled with light when I enter. When the brightness fades, the flowers on the bedside table—its remaining petals pale pink—are the first to come into view, followed by the person sleeping on the bed. Even with her back turned to me, I can tell it's a young girl, no more than ten years old.

I check the room number again. It's correct—Room 207. My master wants this one delivered to him. So young, but I'm not here to question him. Just here to do my job, as always.

My leg bumps against a stool as I tiptoe into the room. The girl sits up in surprise. She's chubby, her round face curtained by her long hair. There's a hole where her nose should be, sucking her eyes and mouth toward it like a drain.

We stare at each other wordlessly, sunlight and the sounds of rush hour traffic slipping in through the open window. A petal joins the other fallen ones on the bedside table. For a moment, I forget what my purpose is, until the harvester pressed against my chest reminds me.

My master knows I'm not good with kids, so the instruction was to take her while she's sleeping. He won't like this. He expects me to be efficient—nothing more, nothing less. That's what a tool should be, anyway.

"Mommy said she's getting coffee," the girl says in a muted voice.

"That's okay," I say. I reach inside my jacket to pull out the harvester, but her question makes me loosen my grip.

"Are you her friend?" she says.

"I don't have any," I say. Such an easy and difficult thing to say.

Instead of asking why, she merely nods. "Can you be one for me today?" she says. She has a weary expression, like looking at a colorless landscape, that you wouldn't expect from a child.

I look at the door, expecting the mother to come in at any moment. Or my master to peer in and gruffly ask what's keeping me from doing the job. His eyes are always on me anyway, no matter what my assignment is. I pull the stool towards me.

"Are those yours?" I say, nodding towards the flowers, drooping stems and all.

"Mommy got them for me," she says, perking up. "You should have seen them when they were still pretty."

"They still are," I say. Only a few petals remain on the stem, eager to break free and fall.

"But they're dying," she says with a giggle.

I fold my arms, unsure of what to say. "Well, were you happy when you got them?"

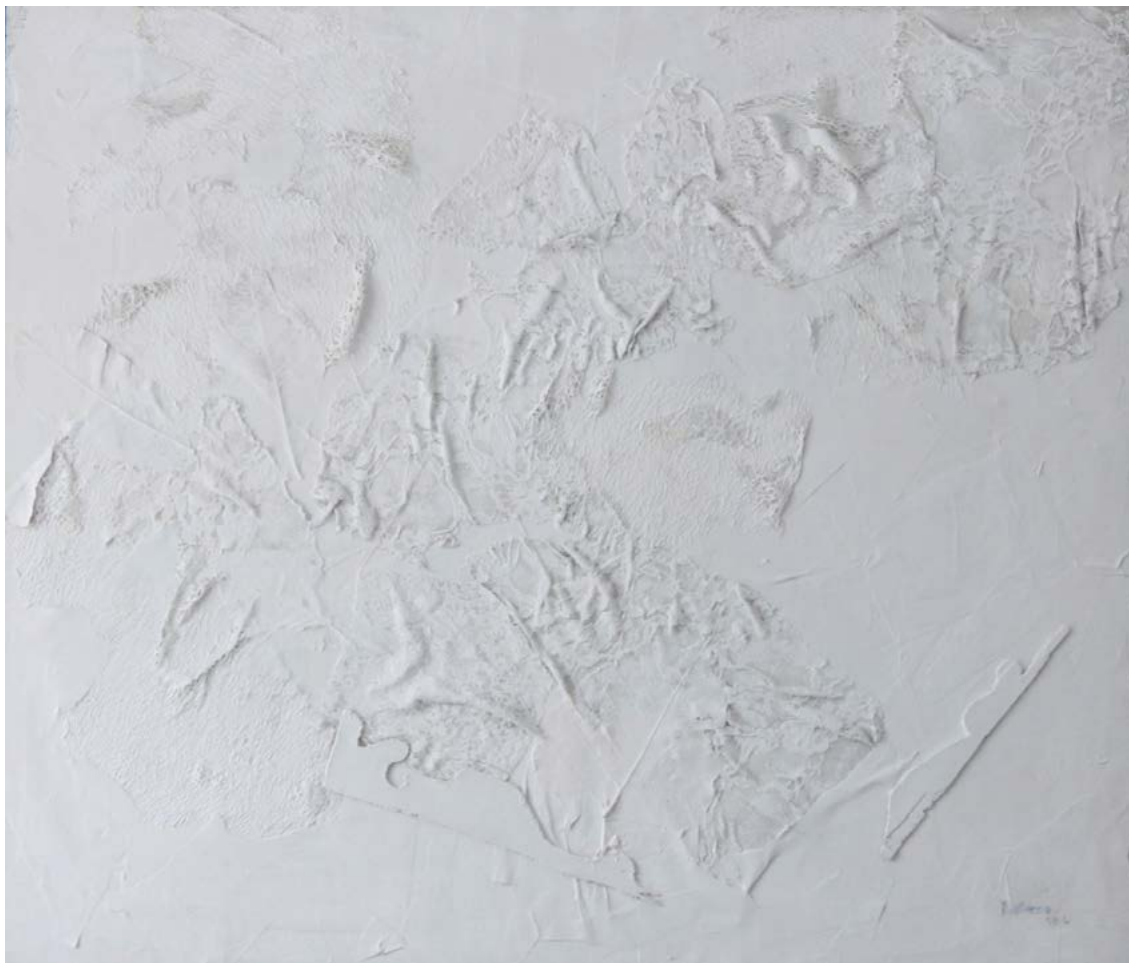
"They're just flowers," she says, leaning against the headboard. "I don't deserve them anyway."

"Why not?" I say, frowning.

"Flowers are for pretty girls."

I should be pulling out the harvester now, but my hands feel glued to my knees. "Not all the time," I say. ●

CANVAS + QUILL



Beauty of Nothingness, 24 x 28 in., mixed media on wood

AN EXCERPT FROM

Angel

STORY *Miguel Llona*

When the man first spoke, Angel thought he was a voice in her head. Eyes closed, she was savoring the cigarette smoke crawling down her lungs when she heard him ask for her lighter. The fingers on his outstretched were smooth and thin like a woman's.

After lighting his cigarette, he lingered like a shadow at the edge of her vision, with only his hissing breath disturbing the silence between them. For the past few days, Angel had been retreating to this dim corner of the parking building across her office, where she sought reprieve from the insect-like chatter of her co-workers. The space was a cocoon, with only the rattling of the steel floors reaching her.

"Isn't this wonderful," the man said.

Angel looked him over. He was bland in a seemingly deliberate way, with a face that would fade in a crowd and a black jacket. She noted with disgust his lanky build and self-assured air, which reminded her of her fiancé. "Sorry?" she said.

"This. The quiet. The beauty of nothingness." Smoke slithered from his nostrils. "Let me guess—too noisy at the office."

She thought of her fiancé. "It's not just that."

"Of course," he said. "Are you happy?"

Angel's insides tightened. "That's...difficult to answer," she said after a moment's hesitation. "Why do you ask?"

"You look like a jilted lover."

Angel sneered. "Maybe that's what you want me to

be," she said. She knew she should edge away, but his words gripped her as though trying to squeeze something out. "What made you think that?"

"It's like you're here to exhale whatever's troubling you. Like you want to fade with the smoke," he said.

"I guess it's not working."

At her feet, cigarette butts lay scattered like fallen leaves. Hand trembling, Angel brought her cigarette to her lips. It was her sixth since she retreated to this spot, and her first few since she stopped smoking five years ago. Smoke sprouted like vines from the tip of her cigarette, the ruby stone on her ring winking at her.

The man raised his cigarette. "They say every puff shortens our lives by ten seconds," he said. "But what's ten seconds, right? Once these burn out, it's back to our problems out there. It's not like they'll just fade away."

She flicked her cigarette away and walked off. A car passed overhead, rattling the steel floors of the building. When she glanced back, the man was gone, only the light haze of cigarette smoke hinting that he had been there.

Angel met him again in a restaurant a few days later.

She was seated by the window, consumed by the view of the condo tower across the street, her dinner lying untouched before her. She was watching the sliding doors to the condo's lobby open automatically for passersby, even though no one was going in.

She closed her eyes and she was there, the doors giving way to her. The lobby was cloaked in shadow. As she strained to see through the darkness, a tap on her shoulder snapped her out of her trance. "Fancy seeing you here," a familiar voice said.

She opened her eyes to see the man smiling down at her. He sat in the chair across before she could say anything.

"I'm Ivan, by the way," he said.

"Okay."

Ivan smiled. "You like being alone, huh?"

"Is that wrong?"

"It is in this country."

"So I need your company, is that it?"

Ivan laughed. "I happen to like this place. I'm here all the time."

"Really. I've never seen you."

"I didn't exist to you then."

Despite herself, Angel felt relieved at the sight of him, confirming she hadn't imagined their conversation from days ago. She kept silent as he waved the waitress over. He ordered a steak, bloody. Before leaving, the waitress noticed Angel's untouched plate and asked if there was anything wrong.

"Yes. These fajitas smells horrible," said Angel, meeting her gaze. "Like something dying."

Surprised, the waitress offered to replace it, but Angel waved her away.

"You know you can't be rude to waiters, right?" Ivan said, watching the waitress walk away. "She might do something to my food."

"I don't care."

"They're capable of anything. They could spit in your food, poison it...you get the point. If you think about it, they're some of the most powerful people in the world. You ever thought of that?"

Angel ignored him and looked out the window. "I hate this place," she said, almost to herself.

"Really?"

"Always have."

"Then why are you here?"

"I'm not. My mind's over there." She nodded towards the condo tower.

"Why?"

"My fiancé. He's there, but he doesn't live there."

"I see."

Angel hesitated before going on, realizing this stranger was the first person she would be telling this to. "He's been

seeing her for the past few months. They stay there for two hours, sometimes three. Then they eat here sometimes. So no, I don't care about waiters or, or what they do to my food, or whether they're gods or whatever, not when my fiancé is..." The words, freed from their restraints, rushed out of her.

"Okay, okay," Ivan said, raising his hands.

"We postponed our wedding for three years," she continued, wiping the tears forming in her eyes. "He's always been busy, but I understood. His agency's taking off now. I was supportive. So much for that."

"That's tragic," he said, smirking. "Again, why are you here?"

She shook her head. "It's just...sometimes I ask myself if all of this is real. Like some parts of my life are just...made up, you know? Maybe I just dreamed the past five years with him, and I'm just waking up now. Or I'm the one living someone else's dream."

"You know, I asked a simple question."

"Why am I here?" Angel said, stroking her engagement ring with her thumb. "We're getting married this December. Finally." She flashed an ironic smile.

"Still?"

Angel stared out the window again. The condo tower looked lifeless, with its empty balconies and dark windows. "That's the dream."

"So you're just gonna live with this your whole life."

"Everything's set."

Ivan nodded, then leaned forward with elbows on the table, as if coiled to strike. "Has anyone told you how pathetic you are?"

"What?"

"Pathetic. You."

"Am I?" Angel said through gritted teeth.

"Well, you're whimpering like a wounded animal."

His mocking tone cut through her. She had grabbed her purse and was about to leave when he said, "But I understand. Misery is comfortable."

"What does that mean?" she said.

Ivan tilted his head. "I mean it's easy to sit around in a restaurant you hate, and pretend to eat while your fiancé, who's right in the building across, is probably fucking someone else."

The waitress returned, setting the steak down before Ivan. He licked his lips, reached into his jacket, and pulled out a curved black blade, shaped like the claw of a giant animal. "Look at you," he said. "You might as well fade into smoke right now. What are you even doing here?" ●



Through the Looking Glass, 45 x 50 x 8 in., mixed media on wood

Through the Looking Glass will run from November 24 to December 9, 2017 at the Dragon Gallery of Yuchengco Museum, RCBC Plaza, Makati City.

COMPASS



UNCOMFORT ZONE

Photographer *Lester Babiera* throws caution to the wind and opens himself to the crowded, dust-filled, noisy, colorful and ultimately beautiful mess that is India

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Lester Babiera



VARANASI

Varanasi was a highlight of my trip— from the burning cadavers, locals swimming (with kids having formal lessons!) in the dirty Ganges River, with its shores lined up with skulls and bones, and the fascinating coexistence of cows and auto rickshaws in the streets.

LAKSHMI NAGAR

My first stop was New Delhi, and I stayed in Lakshmi Nagar. Locals I met on the plane say that Lakshmi Nagar is gritty and chaotic. True enough, it was busy but bursting with color, reminding me of India as depicted in films.





I went to Rajasthan, the region of deserts and camels, because it was a popular destination. But I went there during India's deadly summer season, which proved to be a huge mistake. I spent just a few days in Jaipur before I worked my way up to the Himalayas.

I still can't believe that I managed to backpack around India. My friends were convinced that I won't enjoy it and that I will end up booking my way out after a few days. Their conclusions aren't unfounded; in fact, several factors drew them to it. First off the list is my dislike of Indian cuisine. I skipped meals in conferences when they served Indian dishes, and I hated the smell of curry. I also had an aversion to crowded, dirty and noisy places, something that mainstream media often associate with India. But I still decided to give my travel plans a push. It was time to level up my travel game, and I decided to venture into a place that was unexpected and where I could be at my most uncomfortable.



India's colors and hues are so vivid, it's as if you've stepped into a perpetual festival. Landscapes and scenes of everyday life took on a certain magic with astonishing bursts of color and activity.

After nearly three months of traveling the subcontinent, I eventually found myself enamored with India. Armed with a Canon G3X lent to me by Canon Philippines, India showed me why it is a haven for photographers. The country's colors and hues are so vivid, it's as if you've stepped into a perpetual festival. Landscapes and scenes of everyday life took on a certain magic with astonishing bursts of color and activity. From the busy streets of Delhi to the calmness of the Himalayas, India was truly a feast for the senses.

But as the travel guides warned and the cautionary tales by previous travelers have proven, India is definitely not for the faint of heart. One must be prepared to leave comfort and be ready for anything that the country has on offer, be it good or bad. I had quite a share of travel mishaps in India, something that I had never experienced in my almost year-long backpacking trip throughout Southeast Asia. I was near tears from stress and anxiety at the sensorial assault brought about by the suffocating, dust-covered streets and never-ending honking of auto rickshaws in Varanasi; I was harassed in New Delhi, and forced to spend the night on a filthy bed in Darjeeling.

Nevertheless, India was definitely memorable—from the Golden Triangle, Varanasi, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Amritsar, West Bengal to Hampi and Goa. Every corner of the subcontinent I visited was a treasure trove of stories. But traveling around India for three months is not enough to experience everything the country has to offer—not even a year is sufficient.

Due to its vast size and diverse cultures, India leaves a lot more for me to explore and a return visit is a certainty. There's just something about the uncertainty and discomfort of it all that made the trip not just memorable but character-building; it inspired in me a craving for the unexpected and a hunger for new discoveries. That, and I can't wait to snack again on *paneer* butter *masala* with *naan*, and a side order of *masala dosa*. ●

For more of Lester's adventures follow him on Instagram [@lesterbabiera](#) and [@bujibabiera](#).

Top left: What I like most about Punjab are the Punjabis. They are kind and hospitable. One of the memorable things that I did there was going to an elementary school—me, along with a Dutch friend, literally stopped the classes and became campus attractions.

Bottom left: An intense spectacle between Indians and Pakistanis occur every late afternoon at the Wagah Border during the lowering of the flags ceremony. It is where locals show their support for their respective countries by having a friendly cheering competition.



HIMACHAL PRADESH

For nine days, I did a loop around the Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh with four European stranger-turned-friends and our hardy Indian driver. This road trip was a memorable one, thanks to the good company, trying mishaps we encountered, and the beautiful landscapes of the Himalayas in full view.

G O A

My Indian trip ended at Goa when I attended a wedding. I first met the then bride-to-be in Dharamsala along with her friends. Upon learning that I wanted to witness a colorful Indian wedding, she invited me to be her guest.



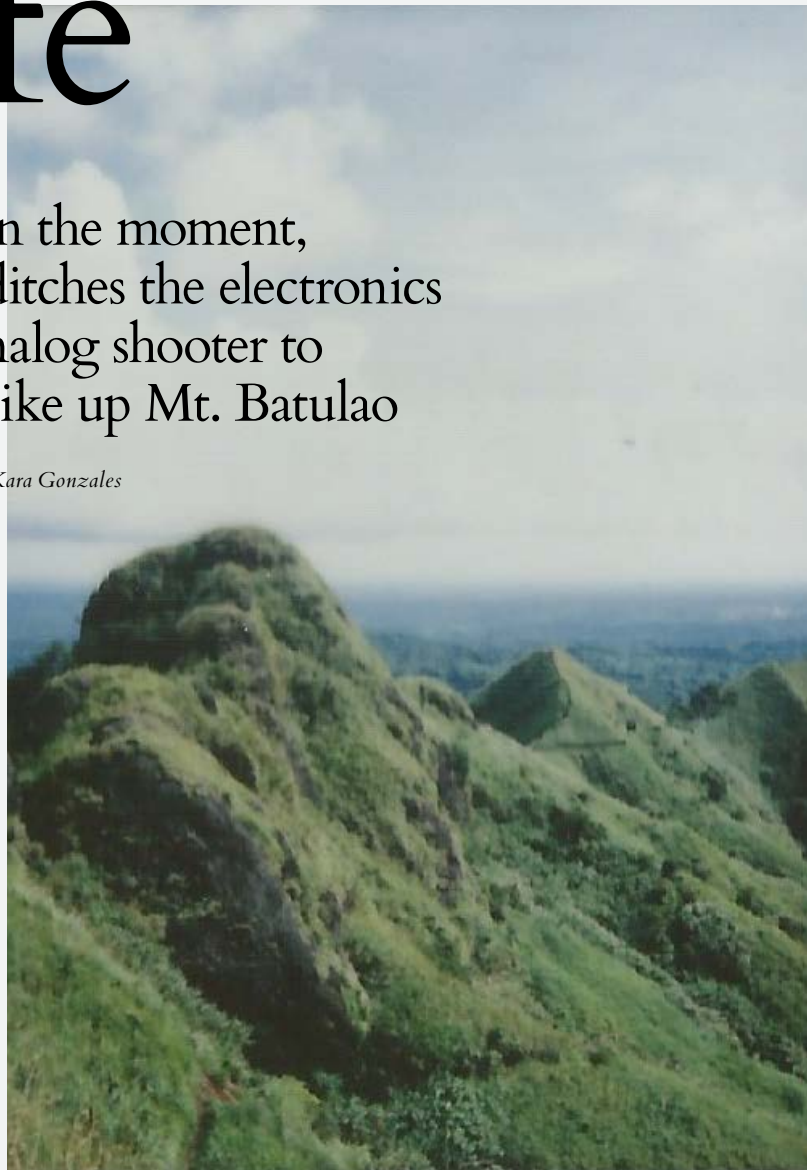
Still Life

In a bid to live in the moment, *Kara Gonzales* ditches the electronics in favor of an analog shooter to document her hike up Mt. Batulao

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY *Kara Gonzales*

THE CLIMB

I took on the mountain armed with only an Instax Mini and just enough film for 30 instant, non-editable, non-repeatable photos.





From top to bottom: There was hardly any sunlight as we began the trek before the climb; A local inhabitant bids us good morning as we began our hike to reach Mt. Batulao's highest peak at 811+ MASL; As the sun peeked over the horizon, the climb became harder—not just because of the sweltering heat but because now that I had better lighting, I had fewer shots!

These days most of us can't survive without our trusty gadgets. Our smartphones and cameras have become an integral part of our daily lives. We have them with us every day, every meal, every vacation, taking photos of our Instagram-worthy experiences, to share with our friends and family and the rest of the world. It can lead one to question how much we actually enjoy our experiences, and how present we truly are in every situation that we snap photos of. So when I joined a group hike to Mt. Batulao, I decided it was time to ditch the electronics and go analog. ●





HERE COMES THE SUN

As the hours passed, the sun rose higher, and the lighting got more challenging.



THE TRAIL

Over the hill and through those trails lie the next seven or so peaks before we reach the summit.

Looking back and (hardly) seeing where we came from made me appreciate how far along we had gone.



HOW SMALL WE ARE

Seeing things from afar and realizing how small we are in this world can deepen one's appreciation of nature, of life, and of all the experiences we fail to acknowledge as we go about each day.

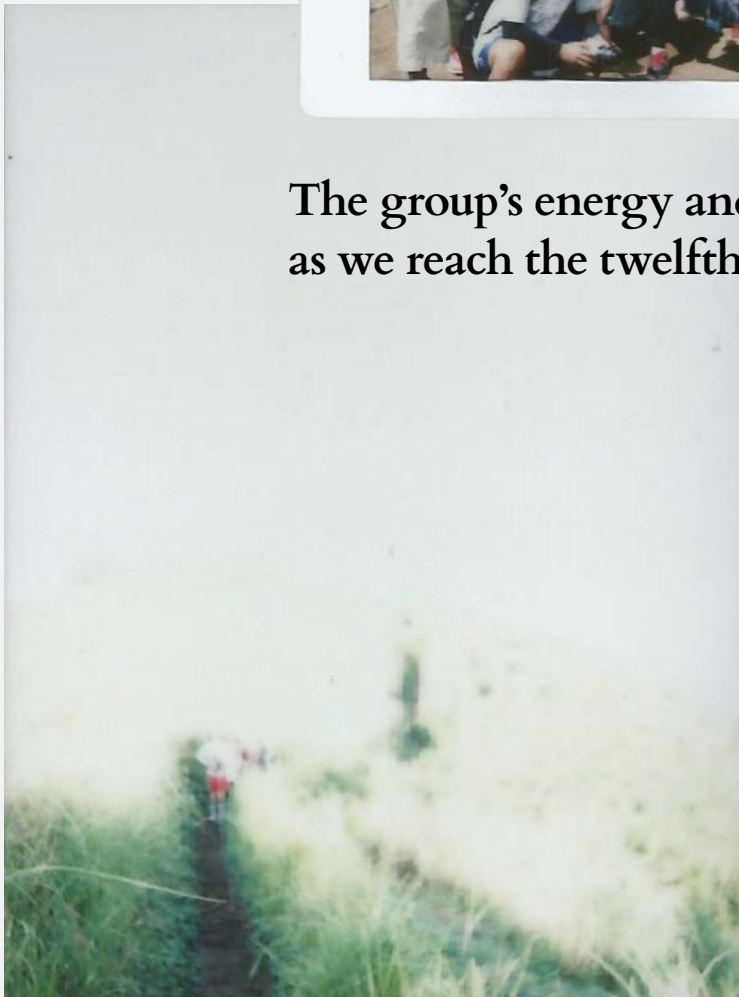


THE PEAKS

Mt. Batulao has 12 peaks spread along the open trail that takes roughly eight hours to climb and descend.



The group's energy and enthusiasm peaks as we reach the twelfth and final summit.



RED SHORTS

A photo of the Batulao iconic trails with a guy in red shorts hardly seems that interesting, but the overexposure makes this particular one a personal favorite.

Follow Kara on Instagram [@kara.gonzales](#), or [@kara.inks](#) if you want to get inked (that would be so awesome!). She's also working on reviving her blog karagonzalesblog.wordpress.com, so please follow her there too.

Supernatural

An innate gift for words and world-building earns speculative fiction writer *Vida Cruz* the coveted 2017 Writers of the Future prize

INTERVIEW *Patrick Kasingsing*

Hello! Please introduce yourself.

Hello! I'm Vida Cruz, 26, Filipina spec fic writer and an occasional artist when I'm not writing. There are a number of occupations I can imagine myself in, but all in all, I'm glad I struck out and stuck to the path of a career writer.

You've recently won first prize in the prestigious Writers of the Future contest. What did you feel the moment you found out about this good news?

Shock, of course, but also joy—I've said elsewhere that I've never won first place in anything in my life before. I was also ready to start crying, but I couldn't because of the long phone call I had with the contest director. Only when the call ended about half an hour later did the waterworks unleash.

What made you decide to submit to the competition?

As I mentioned above, the story got rejected three times. My record for rejections is nine, by which point I start hating the piece and consider putting it back in the trunk. By the third rejection, I still

really liked my story, so I decided to send it to Writers of the Future. I had nothing to lose.

What are some of the preparations a writer has to undertake before joining a writing competition?

A writer has to write, of course. You cannot join competitions if you do not start or finish your entry. Mentally, you also need to prepare yourself for a possible rejection. On my end, I do hope that my work will get picked, but I'm also already starting to line up other possible venues where I can send my work. There are innumerable venues and competitions for writers to send their work out there; rejection from one does not mean a rejection from them all.

You've also been recently published in two upcoming story anthologies. What for you is the importance of putting ones work out there? How does it help build one's strength and character as a writer?

I've been talking a lot about rejection here, but I can't tout its usefulness enough. Yes, rejection hurts. But it also toughens you up as a creative person.



Photography by Mo Maguyon

“I've been talking a lot about rejection here, but I can't tout its usefulness enough. Yes, rejection hurts. But it also toughens you up as a creative person.”

No two people are going to read your work and perceive it the same way. "One man's trash is another man's treasure," and all that. When you submit your work frequently, and compare the reasons why your work was rejected, you begin to learn that 1) you are not your work, 2) sometimes, an editor rejects your work for reasons that have nothing to do with quality, and 3) sometimes, editors reject stories because they do not conform to certain cultural tropes or maybe their own biases. In which case, you're better off finding a more inclusive venue to send your story to.

Apart from that, you learn a few of the ins and outs of the writing and publishing business if you're an old hat at putting your work out there; on the writing end, writers should know Standard Manuscript Format, how to write cover letters and how to follow submission guidelines.

You were also part of the prestigious Clarion workshop for science fiction writing. What pushed you to join, and how did it help you mature and grow as a writer?

All the workshops and writing classes I'd joined at that point were geared toward more general, realist fiction. I felt like I wasn't getting the mentoring I needed, so when I googled writing workshops for science fiction and fantasy, Clarion came up. The roster of instructors for the year I was accepted to (2014) included Catherynne Valente and N.K. Jemisin—two writers whose work I really admired years before I'd even heard of the Clarion workshops. When you find an opportunity to learn from writers whose work you love, you take it—well, at least, that's what I believe.

Clarion proved to be an intense but also really fun SFFH (Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror) writers'

boot camp. It's said that undergoing Clarion accelerates one's growth as writers by two years—and I can attest to that being true for me, too. But apart from picking up new techniques, I also learned new ways of seeing things there; before Clarion, I rarely set my stories in the Philippines and I would write white characters. Being in the US for six weeks, surrounded by like-minded people who were also mostly white (although I did have classmates of Iranian, Indian and Japanese descent) really brought home to me how brown my skin was and how different my values were. Nearly every story I wrote at Clarion starred brown characters and tinkered with the Philippines as a setting, whether present day, near-future or pre-colonial-inspired secondary world. And every story I've written since coming back from Clarion has done the same.

What truths and insights has a career in short fiction writing revealed to you so far?

Well, I'm only at the beginning of mine, but here's what I learned thus far:

1. I tend to write long short stories, and that's okay.
2. Writers can get several big breaks in their careers if they keep at it.
3. Career plans are important, but they should be bounded by loose timelines, not hard deadlines.
4. When one has a career plan, one is better able to say 'no' to whatever doesn't fit that plan.
5. Whatever path I take in my career, I need to commit to it ●

Follow Vida on Instagram [@vidadrawsthings](#) for her drawings or tweet your opinions at her [@laviecestmoi](#).

The World is Vast Enough

Dare to be your most authentic self

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Celine Reyes

Authentic. This was how I promised to live my life when Year Silver—my 25th birthday—came. After years of succumbing to outward pressures, to trying to please everyone but myself, I was resolved to do things my way. I had enough compromise to last a lifetime. It was time to live out my truths.

It began with the way I dress. It was something small but easily noticeable. Soon enough, I was hearing talk. Most were good. Some, as expected, were hurtful. But I just let this wash over my head. It felt good. *I* felt good. I was empowered.

And this, feeling good, became the basis of everything I do. It sounds selfish, sure, but this had been long overdue. I'd been thinking about others for too long. It was about time I put my personal happiness ahead of everything—and everyone—else.

With this in mind, I eventually arrived at a revelation. An admission, really. One that rattled the very foundation of who I was. Something that, if mishandled, would topple everything I'd worked so hard to build. But I was certain. More than ever, I was certain.

I'm bisexual.

Or bi-curious, if we are to be technical about it. I haven't been in a relationship with a girl, but I like girls. I'm attracted to them in the same way I'm attracted—maybe even more—to men. Emotionally. Intellectually. Sexually.

When it comes to love, I've found, I refuse to take sides. And, yes, I'm about to get

married. To a man. *That* doesn't change the fact that I'm attracted to girls nevertheless. Being able to finally say that out loud, to be open about it, is liberating. It is freedom. Authentic.

In a world that pressures us into believing that we must do things a certain way, that we must be a certain way, I thought why must I conform? Why mustn't I be honest? The only measure that matters, after all, is the one I define.

As Year Silver approaches its close, I am filled with pride. Pride for having the constitution to carry out a promise. Everything—all the pain, the heartaches—it was worth it. All the struggle to stay alive was worth it.

So, never ever be ashamed to do things that delight you, of being with people who make you feel good. If you say yes, mean it; say no and maintain it. Yield if you're tired. Fight if it's worth it.

The world is vast—there's enough room in here for talking foul, laughing loudly, trusting strangers, making mistakes and loving hard. You are allowed to be selfish, to be different.

Deviate. Conform. Do whatever makes you feel good. Care deeply if you must. Be oblivious if you must. Just do it all with unwavering conviction.

Fucking. Own. That. Shit. ●



Read more of Celine's wanderings over at her blog celineism.com, and on Instagram at [@celineism](https://www.instagram.com/celineism) for random ramblings.

REEL

Seeing Red



Film prodigy *Mikhail Red* delivers an unflinching look at themes of brutality, corruption and coming of age with his multi-awarded survival tale, *Birdshot*

INTERVIEW *Mikhail Lecaros*

IMAGES *TBA Studios and PelikulaRED*





With ten years' experience under his belt at the age of 26, Mikhail Red is a veteran of the local film industry

Today, with the likes of Denis Villeneuve (*Blade Runner 2049*), Steven Sodebergh (*The Girlfriend Experience*), and Bong Joon Ho (*Snowpiercer*) cited as personal influences, Red's films have distinguished themselves with their unflinching looks at Philippine society's seedier aspects.

25 years old at the time of this interview, Red is a decade-long veteran of the industry, having worked his way through the ranks with practice, hard work and sheer, unadulterated passion for his craft.

"I started making films as early as 15, and I was lucky to immediately get recognition locally and internationally," says Red. "During my teenage years I was competing in Cinemania, Gawad CCP, Cinemalaya, and other festivals abroad, I would use prize money to finance my next short film. Finally when I turned 20, I convinced myself to try and submit a feature length screenplay... It took me a decade of practice before I really gained support, my experience was hard earned and I was patient before finally getting my big break with *Birdshot*."

Red's third film, *Neomanila*, has scored awards for Best Cinematography, Best Artistic Achievement and Audience Choice at the recently-concluded QCinema International Film Festival, but it is his sophomore effort, *Birdshot* that experienced a resurgence in the headlines thanks to its being vetted as the Philippine entry to the 2018 Academy Awards for Best Foreign Picture.

Kanto caught up with Mikhail Red to hear his thoughts on life, filmmaking, and the importance of following one's dreams.

What were you doing when you learned *Birdshot* would be the Philippine entry to the Oscars?

I was on Facebook and Twitter when I saw someone tweet about it. I kept refreshing, and I saw the news slowly spread online. I would've fallen in shock, but fortunately I was already lying in bed.

How does it feel to represent the Philippines with your art outside the country?

It feels great, especially after the long journey we've been through to complete *Birdshot*. We (the entire cast and crew of *Birdshot*) all made sacrifices and we were all patient with the process. Knowing that our film is well received here and abroad and being the representative of Philippine Cinema for the Academy Awards is just a dream come true, everything after that is just a big bonus.

Coming off the heels of your first film, what lessons did you carry forward onto *Birdshot*? Has your approach to filmmaking (or storytelling in general) changed?

Rekorder was a micro budget feature that was produced through Cinemalaya and private investors. With limited resources, I had to find a way to cleverly combine form and substance to reduce costs. The film was about piracy, voyeurism, apathy and the bastardization of cinema, the perfect treatment was to utilize portable digital and video formats to tell the story, it was also a very cost-effective way of shooting a first feature.

For my second film, *Birdshot*, I wanted to try something different, the classical, more conventional approach to the filmmaking process. I was patient with the project and I aimed for a well-crafted film—it took us two years to complete the film through international financing and pitching. Without a local grant, festival deadline, or time constraints, we were able to polish the film and push the technical standards and production value—we released the film when we felt like it was truly ready. The story focuses on a parable-like narrative that required a more traditional sense of film language. I was very clean, precise, and meticulous with every detail—fitting for a tale of tragedy and beauty, violence and grace—the objective was to create a spectacle.

For *Neomanila*, I wanted to finish the film in a much timely manner since the subject matter is very current. I was able to win a grant from QCinema and I partnered up with Waning Crescent Arts and TBA (who also co-financed *Birdshot*). We were able to finish faster with less resources, I felt that as a filmmaker I've developed better decision making skills under pressure. I took a grittier approach for *Neomanila*, using handheld shots to replace tripod shots or controlled motion shots like in my previous films, but I still maintained my trademark aesthetic, giving importance to film language and deliberate shot sequencing. For my fourth film, which is a horror film, I plan to be even more technical with my approach. I will need to work carefully on the storyboard, ensuring that the scares and tension are amplified by my visual storytelling, composition and camera movement.

Let's talk about the making of *Birdshot*. What lessons did you learn shooting your sophomore film?

I learned that to properly make a film with a dynamic cinematic feel to it, I would need at least 20 shooting days. I learned that sound is very important in conveying emotion and creating spectacle, in fact we spent a month just polishing the sound. I learned that when shooting exterior shots for a "western" themed film, your greatest enemy is the movement of the sun. I learned that it will take you at least two years if you plan to go through the international financing route, in fact we were very lucky that we won a significant amount of funding in our first submission attempt, it usually takes longer than that to complete financing. I learned that the best way to make big and well-crafted films and to sustain your filmmaking career is to partner up with a studio that trusts your vision—that is every filmmaker's dream. I am very lucky that my next films are backed by studios.

There's an old Hollywood saying about never working with children or animals, but you managed to accomplish both brilliantly in *Birdshot*. Can you tell us about the challenges you faced in directing someone who wasn't just young but a newcomer as well?

Work with the best. I worked with the best young actress we could find. We got her from a pool of more than a hundred aspirants. I also worked with the best trained dog we could find.

“I was very clean, precise, and meticulous with every detail—fitting for a tale of tragedy and beauty, violence and grace.”



Whenever the going gets tough on set, Mikhail Red reminds himself how lucky he is to be making films that he he wants to make

“Fortune favors the bold.”

We would rarely do retakes because of the animal’s behavior. I also had enough time in production to get the perfect take, and enough time in post to edit the perfect sequence.

How different is *Birdshot* (the film) from your original concept?

You can never match the power of your imagination. When you dream, everything is perfect, from the locations to the cinematography, to the performances and timing, everything works out well when you watch the film in your head. Upon execution, reality sets in, factors that are out of your control sets in. You do what you can to minimize the effect of variance on the result you are aiming for. By the time you get to post, the film you have is merely a fraction of what was in your mind. Finally, at the premiere, you find yourself sharing a compromised version of what was originally in your head, but now it is too late and it is already being absorbed by others. The trick here is to dream BIG, be ambitious and brave, your imagination should scare you. That way even if you only achieve a fraction of what you set out to do, it will still be enough to be considered worth watching.

Your three films have been, to varying degrees, mystery-thrillers. Why don’t we see more films of that sort in modern Philippine cinema?

Because studios rarely risk investing on genres other than romance or comedies. Those two genres have the best cost to profit ratio. Horror also does well, but the problem is not a lot of filmmakers are trained to handle genre other than rom-com, so most attempts at thrillers turn out cheap or too campy. We have a lot of auteurs, artists and passionate film workers, but Genre is something that has its own set of rules—it needs to be studied and mastered in order to be elevated and effective. Only a few filmmakers dabble in the craft of genre films.

We need more filmmakers willing to put out good genre movies if we want to develop the audience’s taste. I’m very proud that my mystery thriller film *Birdshot* was well received by a wide local audience, and my latest assassin thriller *Neomanila* was appreciated by the regular movie-going public, it even won the Audience prize in Qcinema, something quite rare for such a dark

film. There is hope for genre since it has the potential to be accessible to the average Filipino, we can use it as a vehicle to smuggle in important context; we just need to support it.

What entertains you, and how, if at all, does it influence your filmmaking?

Video games. It is a new form of cinema, it is basically interactive cinema and still relies heavily on visual storytelling. I was heavily influenced by *The Last of Us* and *Fallout* when I did *Birdshot*. My next horror film is also partly influenced by *Fatal Frame* and *Silent Hill*. Sometimes I even use music from video games when I hold workshops for the actors, or sometimes I would play the music on set or use them as pegs during offline edit.

Now that your works are viewed and appreciated around the world, who would you say you make films for?

My philosophy as a filmmaker is to always try and reach a wider audience while still making sure that you say something important. I strive to make films that are entertaining on the surface, but the layers beneath should be engaging. I believe that if we can get our message across to more people, if we can change more hearts and minds, then maybe we can change the state of things. It is a delicate balancing act between style and substance that is definitely hard to master. But I am more than willing to learn how to balance it, even if I have to spend my whole life fighting for my convictions.

What keeps you going on difficult shoots?

I remind myself of why I started in the first place. I remind myself that there are others who only dream of this and I am very lucky to be where I am, making the films I want to make. Also I’m bound by legal contracts to finish the film within a set amount of time and budget so there’s that.

What’s the best advice you have ever received (not necessarily film-related)?

Fortune favors the bold. ●

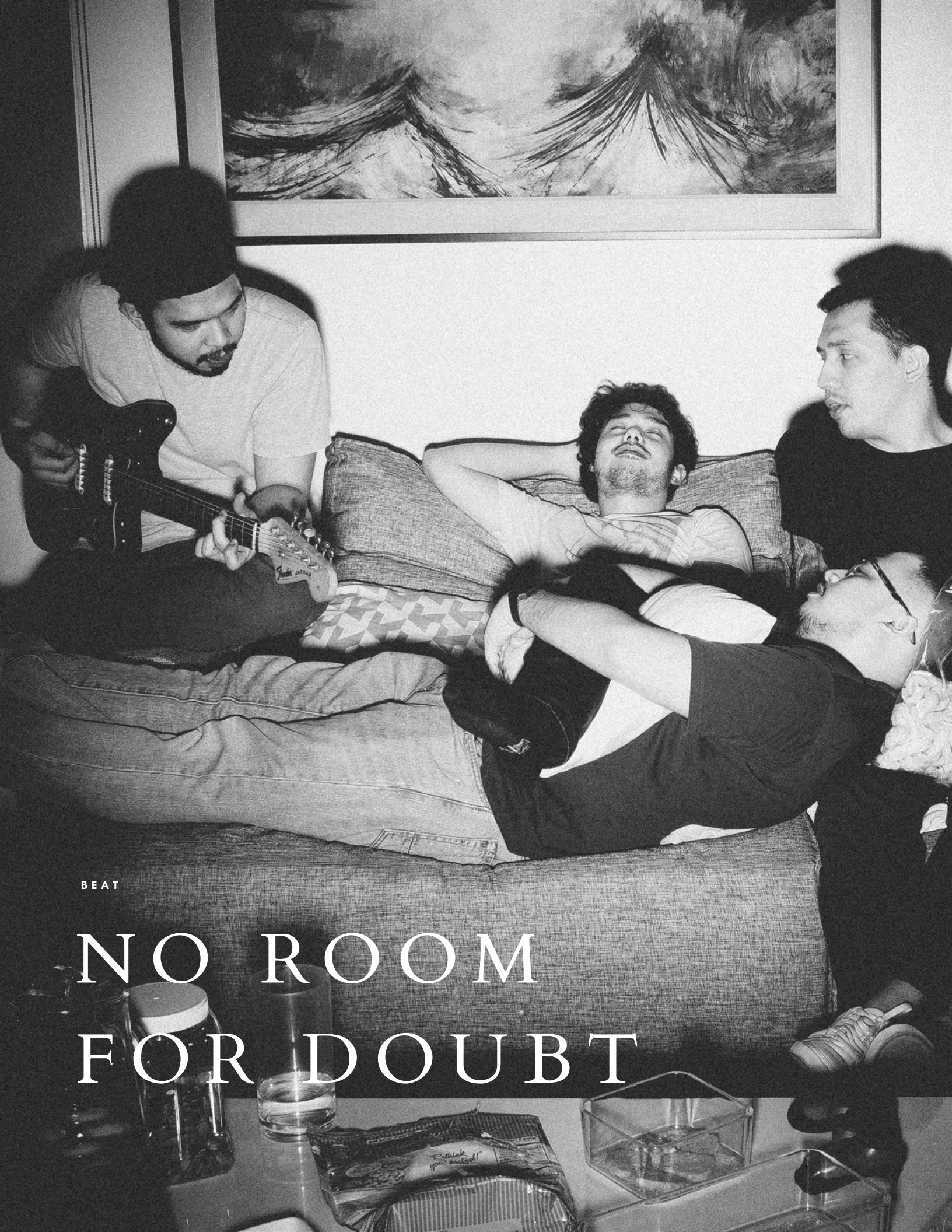


Mikhail Red credits video games like 'The Last of Us' for inspiring the almost-dystopian atmosphere that pervades 'Birdshot'.

A Question of Family

The challenge that comes with being the son of a world-famous filmmaker is one well known to Mikhail, who told *Kanto*, “It comes up in every interview. I can never escape my father’s shadow. I admit that because I am a second generation artist, I was lucky that I was exposed to cinema at an early age.”

Despite this, however, Mikhail is quick to point out that, “I was never forced into the craft by my father. I discovered it on my own, experimented on my own. . . It was never easy for me, I had to learn things the hard way, growing my wings as I was falling – I always use that metaphor for my filmmaking journey. I also struggled to create my own identity as an artist, it took some time before my career gained momentum. People assume that because I am young that I am fairly new to the industry, but they are simply unaware that I’ve been making films for 10 years now!” ●



BEAT

NO ROOM FOR DOUBT



After shying away from the local music scene, *Musical O* picks up right where they left off

INTERVIEW Miguel R. Llona
PHOTOGRAPHY Mimi Morada

For fans of Musical O, the seven-year wait for the next album must have been maddening and birthed a lot of questions. Is the band struggling to produce new material? Did they burn themselves out? Worse, did they call it quits?

The chorus of "Ocean," the first song from their 2009 album (fittingly called *Debutante*, produced by Terno Recordings), retroactively sheds light on the main reason behind their prolonged hiatus. "I wish I was strong enough to anchor my self-doubt," it goes. Warily delivered by vocalist Marco Dinglasan, the line encapsulates the band's mood in the years following *Debutante's* release, as members struggled with personal problems that strangled their joy for creating music.

It took some time, but the five-man unit of Dinglasan, Chino Soliman, Mario Consunji, Miggy Abesamis, and new member Rap Soliman eventually rediscovered their passion, enough to produce an album's worth of songs where they refined the signature elements they've come to be known for—complex instrumentation, intricate arrangements and restless tempos. Producing their self-titled sophomore album themselves, however, might be their most satisfying achievement, despite the process predictably burning them out. Guitarist Mario Consunji shares what the hiatus did for the band and whether another album will be on the horizon anytime soon.

First of all, does "Musical O" mean what I think it means?

Yes, it was supposed to be "Musical Orgasm". But we had some censoring issues, so we decided to dial it back and shorten it to Musical O. I think that still represents what we want to impart with our music, in a way.

Anyone can form their own band, but taking the next step, which involves writing your own songs and releasing an album, takes courage and dedication. Can you share how you took that next step?

Honestly, the first album just seemed like a natural evolution of things—we were all band kids growing up, so making music was something that we always did. Being recognized and appreciated in the local music scene played a part, too. That ultimately pushed us to get serious and actually make an album. It just felt right at the time.

“We went through a period of self-discovery and self-doubt. We were quite young, naive, and idealistic—as youths should be!”

It took seven years before you followed up your 2009 debut with your self-titled sophomore album. What happened in between?

We went through a period of self-discovery and self-doubt. We were quite young, naive and idealistic—as youths should be! In my own perspective, it felt like we needed to grow out of our comforts. Sure, we had made a few good songs, played around a lot at the time, but we never really thought of doing anything more than that—or there wasn't enough real motivation to do so. It was a tough, profound, joyful, heartbreaking period, but we needed it so we could continue making music as we had initially started.

From your first album, your music had an improvisational, playful vibe, almost like you guys were just jamming out in a garage. For your second album though, the songs feel tighter and more structured. What caused this subtle change?

Our earlier compositions were heavily influenced by our youth—our life was more carefree and drifty then. We had more time on our hands and could afford to spend hours and days playing music, getting drunk and talking about what could be better in the local scene. When all of that changed, I believe the music did too. Riffs became more concise, arrangements had more purpose. We were on top of our instruments, our expression music-wise.



Signature elements of the band include unconventional structures and shifting tempos that could disorient listeners. Is this an organic result of your songwriting process?

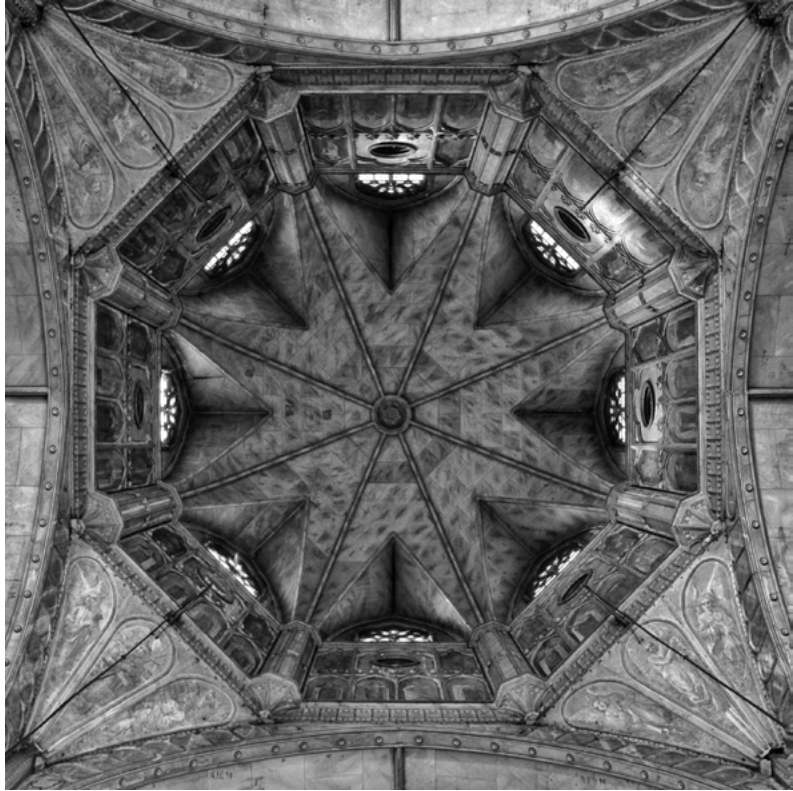
Music preference is a tricky thing, because it is a matter of conditioning for one and serves as a different function for each individual. Our music mainly comes from a place of discontent, so we try to push ourselves as well as our listeners, and we take pride from doing so. The latest album is an attempt to amalgamate the intentional and the organic. Marco would usually have a bare guitar composition to which we all add our own elements after jamming, so now we experimented on starting a song with an idea/theme like “Gerry”—about the death of Marco's father—or combining my simple composition with Rap's riff that made “ISO 100”. I guess there was a lot more deliberate composing, arranging and collaboration for our second album compared to the previous one.

What were the biggest changes you observed in the Philippine music scene from when you first started? Were you influenced by these changes in any way?

The biggest change in the scene was the shift of mainstreams' attention to indie-rock or post-rock. Back then, I only knew a couple of productions and venues that accommodated music like ours, which is what drew us to Terno Recordings. Now, it seems like there's a big audience for such. I'd even go so far to say that there's a dedicated radio station for indie music. That's a good thing for us, because we know people are listening!

With the rise of several new bands/artists, how do you keep up and distinguish yourself in today's music scene?

I think we've done a good job at setting ourselves up from the start. We had a somewhat clear idea of what kind of band we wanted to be back when we started, so it was easier for us to carry out our ideas. But I do believe that it is important to continue to listen and be influenced by others. In a way, that is how you will find yourself and your sound. You like this kind of music, good. You don't like this kind, good too. At least you know what you don't like. ●

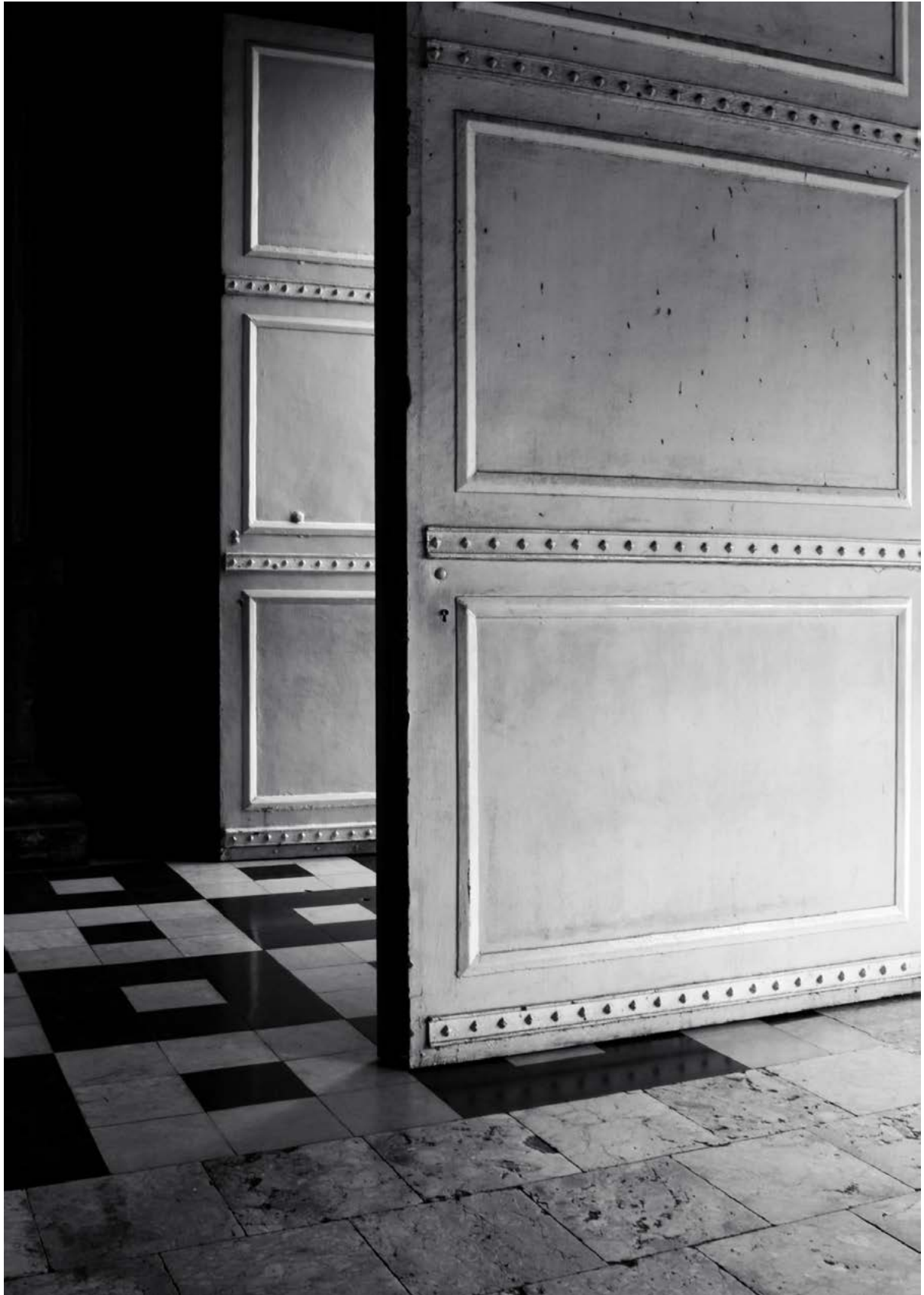


MEMORY

GOTHIC REVIVAL

Engaging heritage tours and photowalks grant curious visitors a revealing peek into the fragile beauty of the *San Sebastian Basilica* in Quiapo, Manila

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY *Patrick Kasingsing*

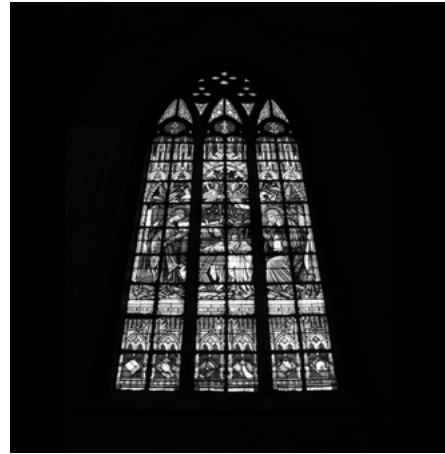
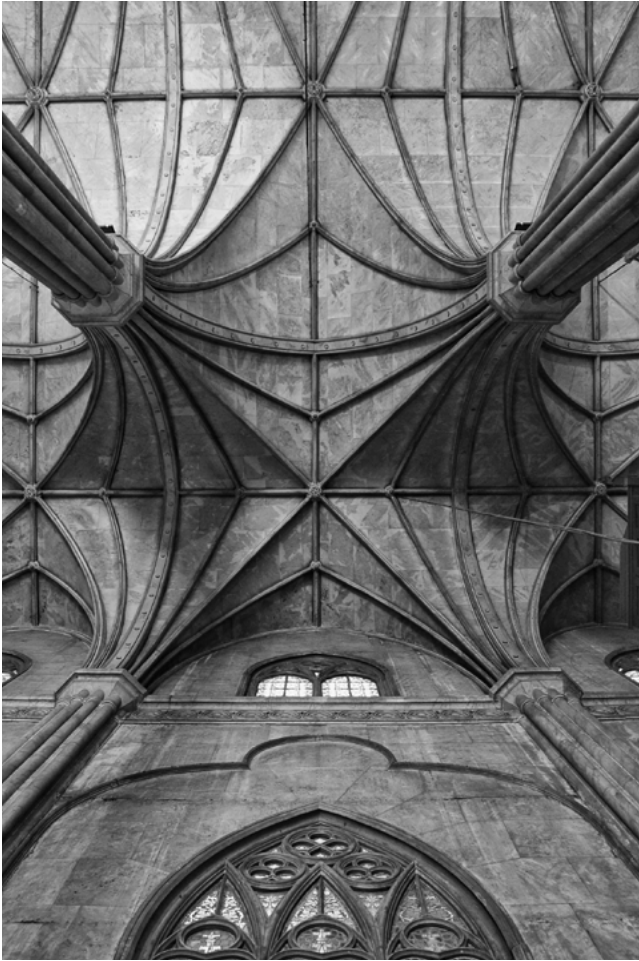




The tours often starts with the opening of the San Sebastian Basilica's tall mint-green metal doors.

As Samantha Pacardo and Ysabel de Dios, community development manager and tour programs head respectively of the San Sebastian Basilica Conservation and Development Foundation, launch into their spiel on the basilica's storied past, visitors are lured into the beautifully-preserved interiors, the church's metallic surfaces bathed in the warmth of honeyed lighting from its glistening chandeliers and through natural light filtering in through the original German stained glass windows of the basilica.

There is much to take in visually: the neo-gothic strain of the church grandiosely expressed through lofty spires, rhythmic vaulted ceilings, and tall, slender columns, all surrounded by more than 140 paintings and *trompe l'oeil* work, a triumph of local art. It is easy to be overcome with the urge to voraciously capture all the splendor and detail with your camera, but pictures tell only half the story.



The beauty of the San Sebastian Basilica tours is that not only does it allow free rein for visitors to document the church's intriguing architecture but also engages them with a fascinating primer choc-full of intriguing trivia and information about the basilica. Aside from adding story and color to the details, this all the more points to the importance of preserving the 126 year-old landmark. The new photowalk tours go as far as allowing visitors to bask in the beauty and glory of the church interiors with doors closed granting an hour of architectural bliss without the crowds, allowing one to appreciate and document the architectural details without the pressure and distraction. This is definitely a rare architectural encounter one won't get from most of our local churches and heritage landmarks.

Be it random quizzes about the church from tour coordinators, all-access trips to the church's belfries for an uninterrupted view of Manila, or the addition of scaffolding platforms for use of photographers and architecture enthusiasts to obtain detail shots, the tours engage its audience beyond mere spectatorship.

The tours engage its audience beyond mere spectatorship. Everyone is invited to be active 'shareholders' in keeping the church alive.





San Sebastian Basilica is not treated as a cloistered relic but as a piece of the past that continues to serve an integral role in its community.

Everyone is invited to be active ‘shareholders’ in continuing to keep the church alive. 126 years of prolonged exposure to saline tropical air and pollution, and an alarming number of leaks and haphazard repair attempts have generated great deterioration that threatens the basilica’s survival. Thus, the existence of the conservation efforts and the addition of tours to help finance the 10-year conservation process.

We often treat objects from the past with a protectionist stance, owing to age and respect, which isn’t a bad thing at all. However, closing off access to it and limiting exposure and connection to society can lead to its being divorced from the country’s continuing story. Clearly, the San Sebastian Basilica is not treated as a cloistered relic but as a piece of the past that continues to serve an integral role in its community. The foundation’s engaging heritage tours and campaigns for the basilica’s conservation efforts offer an intriguing, admirable and effective approach in assuring the survival and continued relevance of heritage landmarks to today’s society. ●

Join in the efforts to save the San Sebastian Basilica and book a tour. Like the San Sebastian Basilica Facebook page [@savessbasilica](#) for updates on tour schedules, trivia and information on the church's restoration. Tag your basilica photos with #savessbasilica and follow the church's official Instagram account [@savessbasilica](#). Special thanks to Samantha Pacardo and Ysabel de Dios for the tour and feature interview.





Culture Club

CHINO Hong Kong executive chef and owner *Erik Idos* wins palates with an unlikely blend of Japanese and Mexican cuisine

INTERVIEW

Vida Cruz

PHOTOGRAPHY

*Stephanie Jung, Alex Maeland
and Justine Tai*

CHINO interiors with artwork by street artist Aaron de la Cruz



Hi! Please introduce yourself.

My name is Erik Idos, owner and executive chef of the restaurant CHINO. When I was 20 years old, I decided to put my passion for the culinary arts into practice by enrolling in the California College of the Arts in San Francisco. After graduating from CCA, I decided to take a chance and move to New York City, where I was offered a position as a line cook at Nobu 57. It was there where I found a great mentor and teacher in Nobu Matsuhisa. He gave me many opportunities to learn and grow. I worked at Nobu 57 for three years when I was asked to open Nobu San Diego. After three years as executive sous chef of Nobu San Diego, I was eventually offered the position of executive chef at Nobu Intercontinental Hong Kong.

What made you decide to blend the cuisines of three different cultures in one restaurant?

I was a Filipino born and raised in Los Angeles. I grew up surrounded by some of the best Mexican street food. My love for Japanese ingredients and cooking techniques developed while working at Nobu in California, New York and Hong Kong for eight years. I decided to combine my past and my present culinary passions to create CHINO—a family-style, neighborhood restaurant with a fresh and creative culinary concept.

Who are your culinary influences? How have they inspired your way of cooking?

My grandparents were a big influence. I would often watch them prepare traditional Filipino food for family gatherings. I still remember coming home from school and my grandpa would be in the kitchen cooking. He made the best chicken adobo, where it was cooked until caramelized. He would save some sauce on the side so I can coat my rice in the sauce. I would have the chicken adobo with garlic rice after school all the time. I still use his exact recipe now and make it for my staff.



Clockwise, from top: Mushroom Salad with Burnt Jalapeno, Chicken Tinga Taco with Pickled Onions and Avocado, and Marinated Pork Neck Taco



What were some of the obstacles you encountered setting up CHINO in Hong Kong?

Staffing. There is high demand for restaurant staff in Hong Kong, so it's hard to find good people. There are restaurants opening almost every month in search of staff. It's also difficult to find people who really actually like working in the F&B industry. Some people work in F&B because it's an easy job option—not necessarily for passion.

Could you break down the different components of CHINO's menu? What is Hong Kongese, Japanese, Filipino or Angelenean about CHINO? What pushes you to keep pushing culinary boundaries?

The main flavor profiles that CHINO focuses on are Mexican and Japanese. We incorporate Hong Kong by using some of the seafood from our local market in Kennedy Town. Our chefs go to the market every day to pick out the freshest seafood. We've grown a relationship with different stalls over the years and they always save the best stuff for us. Our Market Fish Ceviche with Yuzu Lime and Toasted Cashews combines a bit of every profile. The market fish is from Hong Kong, the yuzu is from Japan and the dish itself is inspired by Mexican cuisine. All of our tortillas are made in Los Angeles and imported to Hong Kong. I'm not trying to mix everything together; I just mix what I think makes sense. As for pushing culinary boundaries, I guess traveling and eating at new restaurants regularly, and tasting the local flavors and products feeds it.

How has the general public reacted to your unique menu?

Everyone always thinks that we are just another restaurant cooking "fusion" food. They think we are putting a few flavors together to make it new and cool. But I am just cooking what I know and that's Mexican-Japanese. Once people try the food, they understand how well these two cultures actually work together. Using Japanese ingredients and cooking techniques to create our Mexican fare not only adds interest but opens up palates to new, unexpected experiences. People always think that Mexican food is just tacos, but it's so much more.

If you could do over one thing in your career thus far, what would you choose?

I would take more risks, travel the world and work at different restaurants. Being knowledgeable of a place's local cuisine and products is key to being a well-rounded chef. Every time I visit a new country my first stop would always be the local market. This excites me. ●

“I decided to combine my past and my present culinary passions to create CHINO—a family style, neighborhood restaurant with a fresh and creative culinary concept.”



CHINO: 1B New Praya Kennedy Town, Kennedy Town, Hong Kong. Visit their website at chinohk.com



LOCATION *National Museum, Manila, Philippines* DATE *February 25, 2016*

Parting Shot

A VISUAL ENDNOTE

By Eldry John Infante

I've always had a curiosity for restricted areas. I couldn't resist taking a sneak peek at the museum's storage room, which is a fascinating display in itself. Teeming with artifacts and memorabilia from eons past, it got me to ponder about the ephemeral nature of human existence and the means by which we try to mark memory. As a specie, we are special in a way that we get to ponder our existence beyond mere survival; we desire to live long, meaningful lives, and for people around us to remember us by when the time comes for one to go. We have a long, deep-seated fear of fading into oblivion. For me, the urge to preserve and store these artifacts, big or small, mundane or unorthodox, is actually a courageous response to such a fear. Memory helps bring these dusty objects to life. These are the physical, visual markers of our existence as individuals, as a race and as a species.

For as long as someone remembers, one does not really fully fade away.

See more of Eldry John's architectural photography
and illustration work on Instagram [@eldryjohn](#)

