

2009/10 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships Young Photographer's Alliance Award



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Photography
Junior
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I hail from a family of pack rats, and as a child I never had a problem keeping my mind occupied. The day I stumbled upon the Mecca of family photographs in our garage was a significant, life-changing moment. I became obsessed; I searched everywhere and began collecting these treasures long forgotten by my parents, sitting in containers and tucked away drawers that reeked of time. The older I became, the more I began to piece together these little clues of my family's existence through old letters and photographs. I began to form a quasi-realistic story in my mind about what they were like. I was so curious; my parents have never mentioned anything about the Philippines to me, so I had to seek it out for myself.



In middle school became involved with the Filipino American National Historical Society, I helped to produce two books, which documented the oral histories from the elder Filipinos/Filipinas residing in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and their experiences with coming to America and how they managed to thrive in the



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United States. I was also involved in the Filipino American Cultural Society, which educated/taught history through plays, spoken word and poetry. These organizations enabled me to understand my cultural identity at such a young age, as well as to give me a creative and positive outlet to express myself.



A lot of my work deals with my family, culture and history, but most importantly from deep, buried memories of the past in relation to how I confront them today. I first began composing photographs of obvious imagery like documenting my family in a photojournalistic light, where I depicted straightforward images of poverty and of the living conditions they experienced in the Philippines. Although, I translated these sad images into beauty, I wanted my work to become more conceptual and to have more depth. As my knowledge and curiosity grew, I developed a heightened level of critical thinking; that once-skewed story of my family that I formed in my head as a child began to surface and come full circle as I began to fill in the clues. I began to question and in turn understand, why don't I know my family in the Philippines? Why do we send our old clothes back home? Why are all Filipino mothers nurses? Why doesn't my father teach grade school anymore? Why am I Catholic? Why America?



I began to take portraits of my direct family members, exploring loneliness, longing and time by shooting portraits of my neighbor, along with creating self-portraits of growing up and living in the South by using my partner as a stand in for myself. I also create videos by appropriating old family movies, and have been experimenting with deconstructing photography as a medium and making collages with film negatives in order to form new images. It is through all the trial and error that I have refined my work continuously.

I have made a conscious decision to make a life committed to the community and the youth. I am currently a member of Filipinas for Rights and Empowerment, and coach gymnastics in public schools and churches around Brooklyn, New York. I hope to show my work in galleries and museums around the world, along with creating programs to teach photography and art to Filipino children in the Philippines/U.S., create books that specifically showcase Filipino/Filipina American contemporary artists, and more. Everything moves in cycles, and it will eventually be my time to pay homage to the ones who have inspired me, and I can think of no other way than to better my community.