

PATRICK CRUZ'S ART IS A SIMPLE AND COMPLEX THING

by Eira Raye Gruta

Manila-born-Canada-based multidisciplinary artist Patrick Cruz is a recognized fixture in the art scene since he started with a group exhibit in 2004 and his solo exhibition in 2005. He has been featured in publications and on-line magazines. The artist and his art has gained high regard and positive appreciation here and abroad.

It's surprising to know that his pursuit did not start with art. Read on.





Was it a primary intention to pursue art?

It was kind of an accident when I pursued art. I was about to study Theology in a church along E. Rodriguez, since my high school grades were too low. I was pretty determined to be a priest. My folks weren't sure about art as a career for me and said that money was virtually non-existent in the field. I was almost jaded but then I was still feeling optimistic and applied at UP Fine Arts, which didn't really care about grades that much. I was seventeen at the time when I started art school.

Was there a significant person or event that made an impact on you as an artist?

I remember the first art opening that I attended. At the time, I didn't know the

name of the artist neither what the event was about. As I entered the gallery, the red painted walls welcomed me with portraits of dead people. Right above it were flat gravestones engraved with various names. The artist also staged his death inside a coffin as a performance piece for his opening. There were candles melting on the ground where it occurred. It took place at CCP, around 2004. Later on, I found out that his name was Sam Penanaso, a performance artist who used to live nearby the La Loma Cemetery. I was struck by how the performance and installation actually affected me mentally and emotionally. When the opening reception ended, I had a realization how powerful art can be.

When did you leave the country for Canada?

After one semester in UP, we found out that our family had to migrate in Canada. We arrived in Canada in 2005. I was the first in our family to get a job from a distant relative. I started frying chicken in a fast food joint in Surrey, a suburban city in Vancouver. I worked there for about two years and got promoted. But in the back of my mind, I still wanted to pursue art.

What made you go for it?

I felt like a lot of my co-workers were "lifers", meaning they would probably work there for the rest of their lives. I couldn't blame them, either. Most of us were Filipino immigrants. They probably felt comfortable to be able to speak



Tagalog and freely express themselves as Filipinos, as well as being in the community. Working in fast food made me think twice again between art and life. I was probably feeling a bit existential in that moment when I first experienced snow while cooking trays of chicken thighs!

Where did you continue to study art?

After a few months, I discovered Emily Carr University of Art & Design so I applied, continued and finished my Fine Arts degree in 2010. I didn't know anyone and didn't even know where art existed in this new city. It was hard to establish a new network in a foreign country especially if you are an immigrant.

You faced a number of dilemmas.

I felt like my identity and art was questioned whether I was supposed to act like Canadian or Filipino. It was also a bit problematic for my art practice to take shape in a different social setting compared to Manila where the political atmosphere was more intense compared to Vancouver. It took me about three years in art school before I actually produced

art again. A friend of mine opened an artist run center and invited me to do a solo exhibition in 2009. From then on, I kept doing what I was doing.

Where do you find inspiration?

My inspiration for my works comes from a lot of places, things, events and people. I don't discriminate anything because I know that there will always be something interesting in just about anything that exists in this world. Even a grain of rice could say a lot. I would say that my style is adaptive and always improvised.

What medium do you use?

For the past few years, I have been working on digital collages that involve scanning, drawing and painting. The use of digital also meant that the speed of production tripled, since I never had to wait for paint to dry or scout for materials.

What are your thoughts on being an artist?

Being an artist is not really something you earn after a degree in art school. There a lot more things to consider after you've

produced works. The politics in art comes after and I think it is the most complicated part in being an artist. Although that shouldn't hinder anyone from doing what they are doing because it will always be a part of the system, unless you do a show in your garage where rules are different.

How would you encourage new artists or people who want to go practice art?

For the younger artists out there who aspire to be a practicing artist, my advice is to follow your instinct and trust what you know to describe what you don't know. Keep making works and don't think too much as to what it means or what it will be. Meaning comes after.

Parting tips?

I would also suggest going to a lot of art openings, artist talks and art events to get a good ground of what it really is out there. Art takes shape in many forms and probably is the most complex and simple thing invented on this planet.

Visit: www.patrickcruz.tumblr.com

