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ERBU Interview

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Interviewer: Xiayla Sisson
Painter: ERBU
Email Interview June 7, 2011

*Note: The following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in AAS 201: Asian American Arts and Culture during the 2010-2011 spring quarter as a part of the **Asian American Art Oral History Research Project** conducted by Laura Kina, Associate Professor in Art, Media & Design.*



Artist Bio: Erbu is a Filipino artist born Wivinne “Eve” Red Buhay in Manila on March 1, 1955. Erbu is the 3rd child of Nilo Buhay and Delia Red. Erbu was born into art, with her immediate family being very creative and well distinguished artists in their own right. Erbu’s style is unlike anyone else, she delves into the emotional and comfortable aspects of life giving her art a very home like quality.

For more information visit: <http://erbu55.com/>

Xiayla Sisson: Where did the name ERBU come from?

ERBU: ERBU is an acronym of my nickname and maiden name...EVE RED BUHAY.

XS: Was becoming an artist always your main goal or first choice? If not, what was?

ERBU: I was born into it ...my mother and grandmother, “kuya”older brother are artists so being around art and its various form was not new to me. It was natural I took up art in the university. It was never a question...it was a definite goal.

XS: How strong were your family ties or familiar influences on our works? Did you ever feel pressured to become an artist because your family took that route themselves?

ERBU: Do u mean how strong were my family’s influence in my art? In most of my themes u will notice a sense of home and comfort...even in my brush strokes and choice of color I want it to be pure and natural and non-complicated just like the environment I grew up in. There was no pressure at all...in fact I even shelved it aside for many years to become a full time mother, with no regrets and when the time was ripe for me to go back to the art scene, I did.

XS: What would you say is the common element or theme of your work? How would you define, or categorize your art or yourself?

ERBU: I think there is no common theme really but I tend to use comfortable, non complicated subject matter and themes such as my coffee cups, my kitchen, and my home. I am an expressionist I love pure colors and bright hues... I would rather try to show u how I feel more than how u see a subject...because I believe we all see a subject as it is but not all feel a subject as one.

XS: Who would you say are your greatest artistic influences?

ERBU: My greatest artistic influences would be my professor Antonio Austria, and the art and life of Frida Khalo, the happy feeling I get viewing Cy Twombly works. In terms of having to look up to some who would say I am on the right path, I think it was my professor...his work and his attitude towards his works made me feel confident in my works too. In terms of being what I am now, I think they are the exhibitions that I have done that make me feel fulfilled. But if it's the energy and the inspiration I would say they have always been my two daughters. But, for direction, it is my God.

XS: Does being a Filipino American Artist play a role in your work? Do you ever address Asian or Asian American Identity, themes, or histories in your artworks? If so, please give a specific example.

ERBU: When I am abroad I like to be identified as a Filipino American Artist so I tend to do local themes such as the Filipino Alphabet, the food, the sweet desserts. Last Oct for the Artist Month, I was tasked to do a migration theme of the early Filipinos in America...so I made a Pineapple Lady Picker, the common job given to them at that time. It was fun and again I used the same style, color and strokes I always do. It was exhibited at the Walgreen in Michigan Avenue.

XS: Have you ever been included in an exhibition that was contextualized as Asian or Asian American or have you ever been labeled as an "Asian" or "Asian American" artist? If so, was identifying as Asian/Asian American something that was also important to you personally? Please explain.

ERBU: Yes I have been labeled many names. It's not as important to me but it gives me the joy when I am identified as an Asian artist...I am proud to be Asian. But if there are no labels to it, it's also fine. In fact I like them guessing what I am especially with a name that doesn't sound Filipino and a style that definitely isn't Filipino.

XS: Have you ever experienced discrimination or had to overcome extraordinary obstacles as a direct result of being labeled as an Asian/Asian American artist? Or Female Asian American Artist?

ERBU: Not yet really and I hope I don't feel any discrimination at all. What I have experienced are gallery people who refuse to talk to an artist even on non business environment. I experienced this in San Francisco many years ago .I believe it wasn't because I am Asian. And if that was their reason, it's not my problem but theirs. Chicago is fun. In my own local scene here in Manila it is common for artists to belong in a group and then they are given priority to exhibit in certain galleries that is one of my frustrations.

XS: Have you ever felt that being labeled an “Asian” or “Asian American” artist has placed limits on your progress as an artist?

ERBU: No not at all. I believe that the growth of an artist is attainable if he/she wants it and pursue it. In 2009 I was able to exhibit at the Lobby of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York City by submitting my portfolio through mail. The only limitation I get is financially as I am coming from a third world country where art is not considered a priority at all. Thus there is the limitation on materials BUT not on ideas and inspirations.

XS: What types of exhibition opportunities have changed or stayed the same for you over the years?

ERBU: I have realized that exhibiting outside your home country is easier in terms of booking for a show. In terms of labour of course in my home town where the minimum wage is a lot cheaper, it is easier for me to physically mount an exhibition by hiring a crew of people to do it for me.

XS: What are you currently working on?

ERBU: I have recently been invited to be a part of a prestigious art group called Gruppong Intramuros. It is fairly new but the members have originally been a part of the group formed by a National Artist JOYA. We have a home gallery located at Intramuros, it is the oldest district in Manila built by the Spaniards in the 16 century...it is surrounded by thick walls and floors are of cobblestones. I spend some time of the week here. IN my home gallery I am working on many orange paintings....it has been a constant taste in my palette now. I guess because its summer. It is also the 150 birth anniversary of our National Hero Dr.Jose Rizal and I have been invited to some art shows here and abroad to commemorate this event.

END.