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Jun-Jun Sta.Ana Interview

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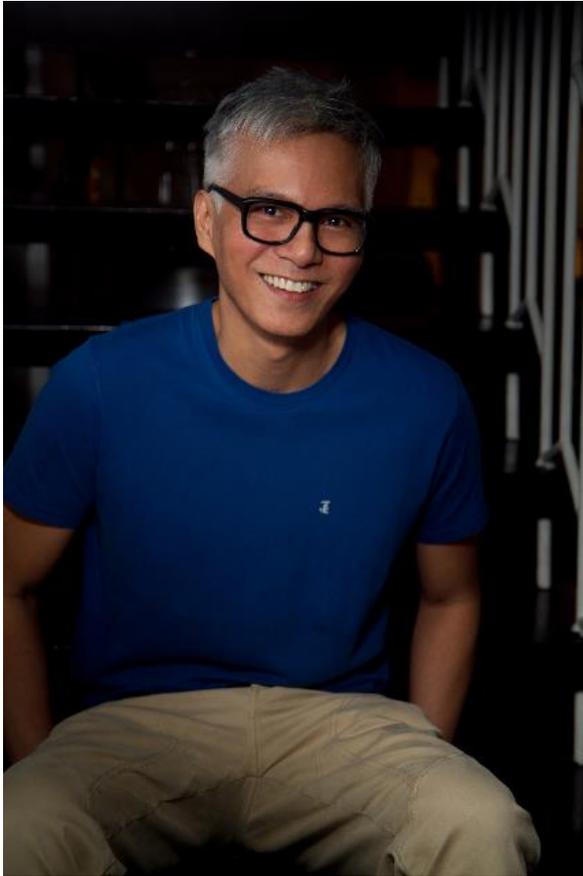
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Interviewer: Jackson Hughlett

Artist: Jun-Jun Sta.Ana

Location: In Person, Artist's Apartment, Chicago IL

Date: February 24th, 2017



Jun-Jun Sta.Ana

(Photo Courtesy of the Artist)

Bio: Jun-Jun Sta.Ana is a self-taught multi-disciplinary artist born on September 19, 1963 to Remigio Benavidez Sta.Ana and Emma Cecilio Catral in Manila, Philippines. He moved to the United States at the age of 24, shortly after finishing a degree in Dentistry. He started his art career late just before he was turning 40- having a solo show of digital works using appropriated images from free porn sites which he deconstructed and embellished with images and symbols culled from Filipino talismans. His practice has become multi-disciplinary, and while still utilizing found images and materials, he also employs the technique of replication which forms his body of works of unconventional portraits. His latest works include cellphone photography, installations, assemblages, mixed media works, and paintings.

<https://www.artmajeur.com/junjunsa/>

(Bio Courtesy of the Artist)

Note: the following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in ART 200: Art & Artists in Contemporary Culture during the 2017 Winter Quarter as a part of the Asian American Art Oral History Research Project conducted by Laura Kina, Professor Art, and Media & Design.

Interview Transcript:

Jackson Hughlett: Let's start with the first one. Tell me a bit about yourself. From the research I was able to do I know you were brought up in a conservative family in the Philippines.

Jun-Jun Sta.Ana: Yes, very conservative, & very religious. So, when I had my very first show it was after both my parents were gone. I would not have been able to show what I did if they were still alive, just because of the very strict upbringing and the images I exhibited.

JH: I know they were both dentists right?

JS: My grandparents, yeah. I finished dentistry school. I never liked school but I had to be in school just so I wouldn't be the black sheep.

JH: You're a multimedia artist and you work in a variety of mediums. How do you define or categorize your art or yourself as an artist? Sorry I know this is one of those questions that is really hard to answer.

JS: I still do a lot of different things- I've started doing assemblages and I've also done installations. The last show I did at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, I showed all assemblages using found materials. I guess it's something that I've carried on since I was a kid, just picking up stuff from the street. Even with images- I use a lot of found images. Like for my first show I found images from the free porn sites and all and I deconstructed them.

JH: Among the mediums you do practice, which do you feel you're most drawn to or enjoy the most, and which were you initially drawn to?

JS: I started out doing digital art, which I still continue. I haven't done much of the digital works lately, except for the cell phone photos.

JH: I know at first you were a window designer for shops, when you were doing that did you think "okay I want this to progress into a career as an artist"?

JS: Oh no, even up until now my process remains the same, I never know how things are going to come out. Everything evolves, which used to be frustrating, but now I just allow it all to evolve so it stays fun. So no, I never really planned on having art as a career.

JH: This I feel like we've somewhat already touched on, but when did you become an artist?

JS: I guess the very first show in 2003. I was given a solo exhibition by a gallery owner and even after the show I was questioning whether I should still continue- but it was well received so that was very encouraging.

JH: So in your “Autobiography” series you used an iPhone 4 right?

JS: Yes.

JH: I thought that was really cool and inspiring. I do photography too, although I’ve done it for several of years and use a DSLR, but I thought for people who don’t have the means for a camera, that you can have a professional exhibition using an iPhone 4 is pretty cool. Obviously, there’s going to be post production that goes into it but still.

JS: Yeah It was a hand me down. I didn’t have a smart phone before that so it was really fun discovering and using an iPhone for that, which started the exploration of using it for art.

JH: The finished presentation and the prints seemed as if there was sort of an analogue aesthetic to it. And I was wondering what inspired that. To take a digital image especially that of an iPhone but then process it in a way that makes it come out looking analogue and film processed.

JS: I don’t really know, I just like it. And then all of the polaroid formats that I put them in is just something that I’m familiar with because it was around when I was growing up.

JH: How was it technically achieved?

JS: All the editing was done on the phone. And then I transfer it on to the laptop just to build it up to print file with the size and the resolution

JH: Oh that’s really cool! Did you just use some sort of filtering software or app?

JS: Yeah, I used free apps.

JH: The quality of print had looked as if it was touched up on a professional software like Photoshop.

JS: Oh no, no Photoshop touch ups. It was just for the building up of the print file, (because of the 72 dpi phone resolution) so I build it up to 300. For the photos with lowlighting conditions (I don’t like using a flash) I have to really build up slowly because the blown up image can be really bad.

JH: I would like to ask you about your “LGBTQ” exhibits. Those pieces where you had kind of a collage with the people you found off of Grindr and websites like that.

JS: Yeah, I have those here. Those are actually the ones I’m bringing to a gallery owner in downtown.

JH: What compels you to do a series like those ones that are LGBTQ related? ‘Cause it seems like your work is so multi-faceted, you’re doing stuff that’s done in Adobe Photoshop and produced floral images. And you have “Autobiography,” and you have the one where your taking images from the free porn sites. Your scope of work is so broad.

JS: It remains spontaneous. The series of men’s portraits I didn’t really plan on, it just happened. I was really careful. I enlisted the subjects really professionally. I gave them my name, my website. I didn’t want to be accused of using it just to get laid!

JH: I know you’ve said now a couple times a lot of your work is spontaneous. But do you have any sort of plans for what future work might hold?

JS: I started painting- I taught myself how to paint. So, the latest works are paintings on canvas. I still use some print element in them. I’m also now a member of the Association of Pinoy Printmakers. It’s the resident visual arts organization of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. I use the workshop there and its free. The Cultural Center provides it. And we hold classes but it’s also the workspace we use, cause otherwise it’s just empty and underutilized.

JH: Do you ever address Asian or Asian American identities, themes or histories in your work?

JS: Yes, I’m still fascinated with amulets and talismans. As a child, I have this memory of my paternal grandmother donning an undershirt full of texts and images. Ironically, she died of voodoo also. It was diagnosed as cancer. But on her skull there was a small wound that started and which grew larger and bore a hole through her skull. There was a healer that performed a treatment ritual and worms were coming out of her head. And she knew, she would say “something’s coming out”, it wasn’t just hocus pocus. And the last thing to come out was an insect with wings. I don’t know whatever happened to that undergarment, but I’ve always been fascinated.

JH: 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?

JS: Here in Chicago yeah, at the Philippine Consulate and then at I think the Skokie Library, I forget. Sorry I’m really forgetful!

JH: Don’t worry it seems like you do a lot, so I can understand.

JS: I also seem to have a short attention span, which is why when I work, I work on several pieces. I work on one and if it seems like it’s not going anywhere I work on another and then I go back.

JH: Well that seems more practical then someone who works on one and gets stuck and then ends up not working on anything.

JS: But since I’m very forgetful if I put it aside I can forget all about it.

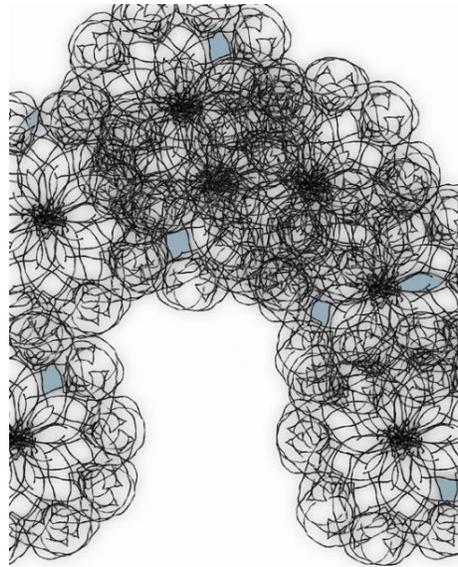
JH: Was identifying as an Asian or Asian American something that was also important to you personally throughout your career?

JS: I don't know if it's important, but it's what I am. I guess it's important so that we're a group.

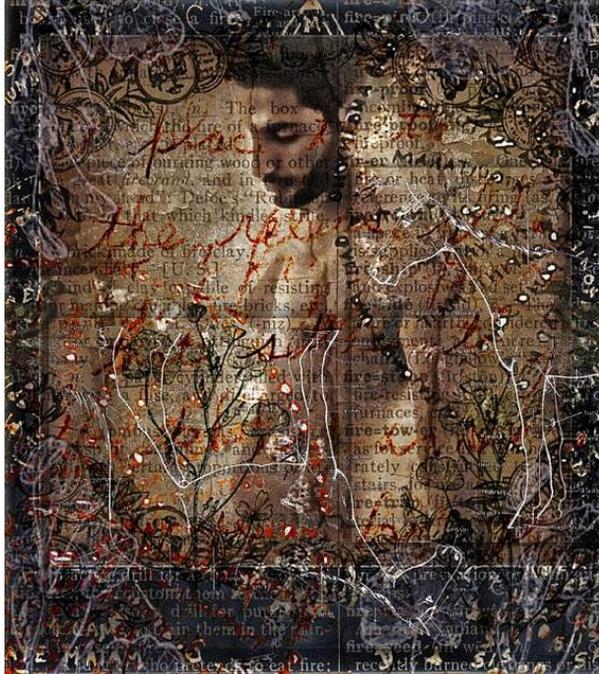
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Pasay Kittens, 2013 ~ Pigment Inks On 19x13 Canson Arches Velin Museum Rag Fine Art Paper ~ Image Consent from the Artist



Floral 2, 2009 ~ Mixed Media, 12x16 in ~ Image Consent from the Artist



Subject No. 8, 2016 ~ Photography, mixed media ~ Image Consent from the Artist