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Interview with Ruben Diaz

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Self-Portrait by Ruben Diaz

INTERVIEW WITH RUBEN DIAZ

Photographer & Art and Design Student

Ruben is a student in Art and Design with a concentration in photography. He was born and raised in Oxnard, California. His short academic career involves attending CSNU, Moorpark College, and Cal Poly. His father, who indirectly influenced him, always had a camera around. He does not really consider himself a photographer, but an experimenter of the photographic process. After Cal Poly, he is interested in attending Graduate School in Los Angeles. The rest of his life, he feels, will be closely related to the fine arts and exhibiting work.

Heidi Wilkinson: What kind of creative work do you participate in?

RD: At this moment, I mostly experiment with photography. From a technical perspective, I use color photography and I also work with night photography. I would like to work in groups with creative productions. For the last small bit of time that I have, I work with sound and films. Sometimes, I will record sounds, or film different scenarios, and then connect the images to the sounds. When playing with sound, working with a few creative people is essential.

HW: Where do you think your inspiration comes from?

RD: I look back to where I came from, Oxnard, California. The area is quickly developing environmentally, which is slowly erasing my deepest memories. When I grew up there, vast fields and huge power lines covered the landscape. You could see the mountains in the horizon from the flat farmlands. People know Oxnard for its long rows of strawberries, but the objects around these landscapes are what interest me. For example, rusty farm equipment and run down fences silhouette and bask in the sunset's blanket. In the way many people might see these things as old or dirty, I only see beauty.

HW: Do you think nature was a big influence?

RD: Not in the sense of the images portrayed by *National Geographic Magazine* but more in the sense of how Mother Nature can be random and incohesive; it's interesting what nature leaves behind when you really look at it. I try to experiment and add this randomness to all of my art and use whatever I can get my hands on.

HW: Is there a connection for you between the traditional muses and the 21st century arts?

RD: Definitely. There is a connection. But for me, the Muse is recognizing the inspiration falling in my lap. I don't really go out searching or calling for inspiration; I see it

in everyday objects. These inspirational moments won't always spark artistic endeavor, but they do stay with me. It is like I fill drawers full of "art information" and open them when a project arises.

HW: Many of the liberal arts (art, music, dance, and theatre) would traditionally require a muse. Now, they are barely taught, much less popular modes of artistic expression. Do you think people find the Muse important today?

RD: In this society, artistic expression is second to earning a living. People are more worried about getting a job than self expression. Money is what everyone wants, but for me, artistic endeavors guide my life. Sadly, people don't get a chance to find themselves artistically because of economics. More and more art programs are being cut in elementary schools, and that is only adding to the problem. The Muse is still important today, but the audience is dim.

HW: Do you think the entertainment industry is the only place for artists to thrive and express their inspirations?

RD: No. The industry provides a quick way to make people understand what you want to say because it controls everything. But there are other ways. If we didn't have TVs or radios, people could connect and express themselves within communities. People could share artistic interests by creating a web of relationships, a sort of rolodex full of creative people. Sometimes, on the other hand, people have to use this huge industry to catapult their ideas while they can.

HW: Where do you think people should go for inspiration?

RD: It's really simple: people should go into their own minds. I want to find my own direction of interest. I don't want someone to tell me where to go, what to watch, what to listen to. And, often times, I learn and get inspired more from people who are not necessarily teachers. For example, I am inspired by Barbara Morningstar, the coordinator for the Cal Poly University Art Gallery, and the way she deals with students. When we interact with each other, it feels more like a friendship than an actual instructor or manager. Once people get comfortable, they can learn from each other.

Another inspiring person is my mentor, Ben Helprin. Any time that I have needed help, he has been there to guide or give me suggestions. Ben gives confidence to young artists, which sometimes is dangerous because there is nothing to stop the inspiration. ☺

Interview conducted by Heidi Wilkinson, who teaches writing courses in the English Department and writes poetry.

Self-Portrait by Ruben Diaz.