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Visual Media

Curated by Jason U. Kim and Kristen Sun



Pocho, *The Smiles of the Bay*, 2009. Digital photography.

Pocho

Interview by Jason U. Kim

Pocho's "The Smiles of the Bay" was selected by the editorial staff as the winner of the 2012 cover art competition. The full-length, unedited audio version of the interview is available on our website.¹ We would like to thank Pocho for taking the time to speak to us about his work. —*NSN*

Kim: Can you tell us about your upbringing?

Pocho: I was born in Santa Paula and my parents lived in Oxnard, California, and [my mother was a] union organizer for the United Farm Workers and my dad worked for the State as a negotiator, but he was on the side of the farm workers, [and] so he would give them information and totally work with the farm workers over the growers...

My mom was a narrow, nationalist Chicana that thought that white people were, for real, the devil. She would be totally okay with random regular white people dying on T.V. in a car accident because she had just so much hate in her heart [since] she got beat for speaking Spanish in El Paso and stuff like that [while growing up].

Though my mom had a lot of problems [with my dad at first], through their talking and arguments, my dad showed her a class analysis – my dad was a poor white kid from Alabama and she was a poor Mexican girl from El Paso. She'd have tortillas with butter and my dad would have mayonnaise sandwiches, and so they started to connect [and] she started to see that other people of color and Caucasian people had the same experiences as her... And so they fell in love [while in the movement].

Because of me being half-Irish, half-Mexican... My last name is an Irish last name and a Mexican last name, so when they would say my name in class, I would get really embar-

assed because people would laugh at me because in person I look pretty Mexican.

Through a lot of little things like that and people bothering me about my identity – not speaking perfect Spanish... I speak Spanish like a *pocho* – like someone who's from here... [as well as] growing up in the hood influenced me [in my teenage years]. I didn't know who I was so I started to hang out with the local gangs – the *Norteros*. When I got jumped into my gang, everybody shut up and nobody made fun of me ever again and [I] never heard laughs in class...

After I graduated high school, I got into trouble and was on probation, and had some time to think about my life. I moved to L.A. when I was 18 years old and went to Santa Monica College [and there] started my activism. I feel that I'm lucky I survived the streets since I lost around twelve acquaintances and one of my close friends got 21 years for murder...

When I got away from the gangs [and into activism], I saw that the movement had the same culture of community, love, protection, and being warriors.

K: On your Facebook, you say that you practice something called "liberation photography." What is liberation photography?

P: Liberation photography, I got it from liberation theology and the option for the poor...

From the beginning, my whole life was looking at our people in the '60s and before that. I don't take pictures of models [or images that you might see on a postcard] like Ansel Adams... There's an intention behind my photography. There's an intention behind using my camera as a weapon, as a tool – and that's liberation. I want to liberate my people, all of our people, from capitalism and imperialism and the dehumanization of our people on a daily fucking basis... It's my form of activism; it's my form of giving back and serving the community...

I think that every social movement needs a visual movement to empower it, to support it, to legitimize it, and also to [be counter-hegemonic]. For example, the government and corporate media outlets like Fox News [depict] immigrants as criminals, while my media [through] Pocho TV [on YouTube, as well as my photography] shows immigrants as empowering, creative, strong, smiling, and happy people and it's counter-hegemonic.

K: How did you come to photography specifically as the medium for your activism and creativity?

P: I actually haven't been doing this for long – people are like "where did this Pocho come from?" In fact, I've only been doing it seriously for a year or two. I graduated in 2008, [and by] 2007, I held every position in MEChA, and they wanted me to stay around and gave me a position as an *ourstorian* or historian (of course we called it *ourstorian* so it's not gender biased) so I started taking pictures of our events, little marches, this and that...

They gave me a real small [point-and-shoot] digital camera and I would use it to make all kinds of crazy shots and get all up in people's faces. [I now have a \$2000 zoom lens so I don't have to do that anymore!...] I [also] majored in Chicano/a Studies and History and started to put it all together and [began to think about my photography as a historian].

K: Can you speak to us about your creative process when you're taking a shot? How do you

operate when you're on the scene?

P: [First], I grew up with unions and observing people my whole life; I'm a super people-watcher... You know when you do something so much it becomes natural? Because I've been watching people my whole life, I kind of know when somebody's going to yell loudly or make an emotional statement, or a kid's about to get up... I know how the movement works; I know the movements of the movement.

[Second], I'm really interested in the faces of the movement – not just these big, broad pictures of just the march – but getting in there and [asking], "Who are these people?" Almost all my pictures are live portraits. Even if they're looking at my camera, they're just looking at my camera [and I never ask people to pose for me]... I [also] don't believe in Paparazzi-ing the fucking movement. I try not to get in the middle of anything that's going on [in order] to capture the naturalness of [the moment].

[Third], I never, ever put in colors that didn't come from the image... I push the colors to the limits sometimes – it's like pushing yourself almost. I push them to see what colors are there [to] capture the insides of you. You know when you get that feeling in your chest, or your hair stands up, or you get goose bumps because some woman is speaking her heart out or something? How does that feel, right? ...Because in the end, this whole movement is internal [though] we express it externally a lot of the time.

K: Speaking about your photograph "The Smiles of the Bay" that won our cover competition, can you tell us about the two boys that are in the picture or the context for it?

P: One thing I love about the Bay Area is that there is a lot of support [and solidarity]. One thing about that image is that immigration is sometimes [just thought about as] a Latino issue, though there are huge amounts of the Asian community dealing with [it] too and are starting to [speak out] on immigrant rights... These two young brothers – I really enjoyed them because they were just so positive – I'm really tired of the "oh, poor me" [attitude]...

We know that we're oppressed, but I'm looking for solutions, and it feels good to be in the movement. It might be hard times, but we can have good lives within these hard times. They were chilling in the square in [downtown] Oakland, and I [was just walking by and] snapped it.

K: You mentioned this already, but one of the reasons why we selected this image for the cover of our first issue is precisely because of the positive energy that it conveys – so much of the time when we're talking about Ethnic Studies, or racism, patriarchy, etc., we lose sight of what we're fighting for and the hope that exists in this world, the hope and love... We were really [refreshed] by the image because of the positivity it conveyed.

Is there anything like you'd like to tell people about bridging activism and art? There are a lot of young artists, photographers, and activists that would love to do what you're doing. What kind of advice would you offer them?

P: Keep shooting... "Artivism" is essential – you can't have a movement without art... If you're not doing it for the betterment of humanity ([and] art is such a humanitarian thing), or to liberate themselves and the people around them, then [you] are just not going to get much

out of it... Any artist or photographer that is [doing creative work] for a cause, just keep doing it and keep following your emotions. A lot of people get annoyed by not making any money, but for me, I looked at it as something I did for the movement. But then I started to get good at it, and people started to want my services... Keep the struggle alive, don't stop.

K: To finish off the interview, can you tell us about any upcoming projects that you're working on right now?

P: We just dropped my first music video that was [shot in] the South Bronx in New York with a group called Rebel Diaz... for their new song "Soy Rebelde" ("I'm a Rebel").²

I am also working on two books: *A Dream Visualized* [in which each chapter visually looks at a day in the life of a DREAMer], and the second book I'm working on with my father is called *Face Capitalism*, [where in the first half of the book, each page will have a full-sized image where you will] need to face capitalism and see how it destroys us, [and the second half] will be about solutions and fighting capitalism.

Notes

1. Jason U. Kim, "Interview with Pocho, Liberation Photographer," 11 May 2012 <<http://nsn.berkeley.edu/interview-with-pocho-liberation-photographer>>.
2. REBEL DIAZ, "Soy Rebelde" 2012 (Official (HD720) Music Video) Directed by Pocho1 Visual Movement, 2012 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wizGMIcllws&feature=youtube_gdata_player>.



Pocho, *These Walls Don't Lie*, 2009. Digital photography.



Pocho, *We Care Too*, 2010. Digital photography.

Pocho, *Warrior Women in East Oakland*, 2009. Digital photography.





Pocho, *Seeds of Resistances*, 2010. Digital photography.



Bo Luengsurawat, *Drift No.2*, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24".

Bo Luengsurawat

Interview by Kristen Sun

Bo Luengsurawat's *Drift No.2* (seen opposite) was selected by the editorial staff as the runnerup for the 2012 cover art competition. In the artist's own words, his work "imagines the emergent shapes and forms of futurity." He can be reached through email at: Luengsurawat@gmail.com. We would like to thank Bo for taking time to discuss his artistic vision and work with us. —*NSN*

Sun: Tell us a little about yourself.

Luengsurawat: I am an interdisciplinary artist, scholar, and activist currently based in Los Angeles. I recently graduated from the Asian American Studies M.A. program at the University of California, Los Angeles and hold a B.A. in Visual Studies from California College of the Arts. For the past few years, I have been working to incorporate my artistic practice and activism into my scholarly work, and vice versa. My research interests, as well as sites of intervention, include cultural studies, ethnic studies/Asian American studies, transgender studies, queer of color critique, and disability studies.

My Master's thesis *Defying the Gravities of Recognition: Conceptualizing Alternative Politics of Identity Through Cultural Productions by Asian American Female-to-Male Transgender Artists*, discusses the intersection of race, masculinity, and transgender identity, and the ways in which trans/queer of color artistic production challenges the capitalist logics of representation and visibility. One of my thesis chapters is included in this issue of *nineteen sixty nine*.

My visual, performance, and multimedia work has been exhibited at Fresh Meat in the Gallery VI: *Defying Gravities*, the National Queer Arts Festival 2011 (Queer It Yourself—

Tools for Survival), and the Tenth Anniversary San Francisco Transgender Film Festival. One of my artworks was chosen as the cover image of *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader, Second Edition*, edited by Min Zhou and J.V. Gatewood (New York University Press, 2009). My collection of poetry and short essays has been published in *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*, edited by Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergman (Seal Press, 2010); *Uproot: Queer Voices on Migration, Immigration, Displacement, & Diaspora* (zine, forthcoming 2012); and the *Anthology of Trans and Genderqueer Poetry*, edited by TC Tolbert and Tim Peterson (Trace) (EOAGH Books and Nightboat Books, forthcoming 2013).

S: The editorial staff really liked *Drift No.2*, especially the nebula-like characteristics of the piece, which we felt spoke well to the constant formations/reformations of the field of Ethnic Studies. What was the creation process like for *Drift No.2*? Additionally, can you also speak about your other piece, *Drift No.1*, which is also included in this issue? How do these pieces connect to each other?

L: Thank you so much.

I created both pieces, *Drift No.1* and *2*, together as they were part of the same process. My intention was to capture movements and repetitions, and to observe the kinds of space, texture, and ambiance they create. I worked on both paintings in layers, starting from lighter backgrounds, almost monochromatic, then working my way up to the darker tones and wider range of colors, creating a sense of depth. The movement and pace of these two paintings, as I felt during the process and in the end products, were completely opposite—*No.1* was swift and unidirectional, while *No.2* was slow and less predictable. But essentially these two paintings were part of the same process and they complimented each other in the end (they even embody similar color schemes).

When I started working on these pieces, I had no idea how they would turn out. That was part of the excitement actually, to let this unknown process lead me. It all began with my speculative feelings, my desire to explore and articulate something—certain shapes, forms, textures, movements, spaces, etc—that were unknown and had not yet come. Most of my abstract work started out this way, unpredictable and emergent. Especially with *Drift No.2*, the nebular movement and texture of the piece give a sense of something moving and growing in unknown directions. It is important as well to note that certain parts of the painting were attuned to the gravity, and that these geographical shifts, drifts, and drips were affected by the natural conditions outside the painting. I believe that it is these articulations of future that transcend the consciousness of the present, yet grounded in lived material conditions, that ethnic studies and other disciplines of knowledge production must absolutely encompass.

S: What are some central themes that are important to you as an artist?

L: Over the years, I have learned to appreciate the work I made at different points in life, to treat them as a record of my intellectual and personal growth. At times, when I look at some of my old pieces, I would be fascinated by the relevancy of the artwork I created back then, under different living conditions and modes of consciousness, to who I am in the moment.

My immigration history and complex gender positionality have influenced much of my work, and when I come across something I made almost a decade ago when I first arrived in the United States—grappling with the overwhelmingness of cultural difference, for example—I would find myself pleasantly surprised by how accurate my artistic articulation was back in the day to my present mode of being. Although the driving force and conceptual framework behind some of these pieces may be inapplicable to my present circumstances, I still find the work themselves make sense to me, given my current interpretive archive.

It may have been my own structure of feeling that translates across temporality or, more likely, the universal quality and accessibility of artistic production that allow for multiple readings, interpretations, and connections. This is definitely another instance where artistic production has the potential to transcend our consciousness in the moment and connect our being in the present to who we have yet to become.

S: You describe yourself as an interdisciplinary artist, scholar, and activist. How has your work been deepened working in these various areas and being informed by different perspectives?

L: To me, it is impossible to separate any of these identities and modes of being/working from one another. I feel that, on the one hand, my artistic practice and creative ways of seeing significantly help expand/deepen my research methodologies and the content of my scholarly work.

On the other hand, approaching my artwork with a critical lens helps me better understand my creative processes and situate my cultural intervention in perspective. I enjoy writing about artwork and performances, as well as creating them, since cultural production, as I know intimately, is a rich site of meaning-making and transformation. Working at this intersection of critical writing and the arts makes me appreciative of the myriad ways in which communication and knowledge production take place, and this is what I perceive of as activism.

S: As you mentioned, one of your Master's thesis chapters, "Badass, Motherfucker, and Meat-Eater: Kit Yan's Trans of Color Slammin' Critique and the Archives of Possibilities," will be included in this issue. You also mentioned that you situate this chapter in conversation with the fields of Asian American Studies, trans/gender studies, queer studies, and performance studies.

Since the artwork that you submitted to the journal is more abstract, what are the connections among the scholarly work that you do, the academic fields that you are in conversation with, and the art that you produce?

L: My written work primarily critiques the logic of visibility and challenges the capitalistic regimes of representation, and this is the intervention I continuously make within these fields of knowledge production and community activist settings. Much of what underlies our perception of reality at this temporal juncture is the kind of cultural politics that requires social subjects to establish (oftentimes impossible) proof of belonging to a particular identity/imagined community in order to gain recognition and survive. It is this disciplining notion of recognition—our cultural failure to comprehend what is not immediately legible—that I

also challenge through my artistic practice. My process of creating the artwork selected for this journal issue, as mentioned previously, is illustrative of the connections between my scholarly and artistic work.

S: What are some current projects that you are working on?

L: I have been doing a lot of creative writing lately—poetry, short essays, memoir, and non-fiction genres—as a form of healing.



Bo Luengsuraswat, *Drift No. 1*, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24".



Bo Luengsurawat, *Untitled (Unknown)*, 2006. Linocut print, 7½" x 10".

Tejida Nostalgia

My focus as a photographer is to try and capture the mundane moments of Latin America. I like to showcase the beauty of my culture, the vibrant colors of my people, and the rhythm of its landscape. For me, every photograph is like a poem and the titles of my pieces help compliment my vision.

This series titled, "The Rhythm of Landscape," focuses on the women of Central and South America. My main goal in this series is to highlight the importance of preserving indigenous cultures in the face of popular culture. — **Claudia D. Hernández**



Claudia D. Hernández, *El llano y sus flores*, 2011. Digital photography.



Claudia D. Hernández, *La espera~The Wait*, 2011. Digital photography.



Claudia D. Hernández,
*El ritmo de la tierra~The
Rhythm of Landscape*, 2011.
Digital photography.

Snapshots of a Movement

(Snapshot: a break and an explosion, history making and history vanishing)

I do not consent to state violence perpetrated upon emissaries of peace.

I do not consent to brutalized bodies.

I won't "occupy" because it's too hard to hear today's protest chants of "we are the 99" over the screaming of history's tanks and artillery.

I won't "occupy" because occupation is how I locate my body in hostile American terrain as having known hunger, poverty and alienation.

[... hundreds in riot gear, lined up. I watched a few in the back of the line literally dance with excitement over the anticipation of going in. A big fire was lit, the pigs went in and shot off so many rounds, explosions went off, it was so heavy I left soon after. It reinforced everything I thought about police brutality, we'll talk more today.]

Tonight,
This may be something like,
Inhaling teargas,
But exhaling songs.
Transforming fear and oppression
Into LOVE.

Yes,
This is a story
Of revolutionary love.

For I am no longer afraid to admit,
That what I want is to love.

And what I see and feel,
In the reckless, swinging batons,
And thick chemical clouds of toxic, sour smoke,
Is only fear.
That is,
The unfulfilled desire to love.

The sound of sirens and crunch of army and police boots strike a similar note.

The sensation of hunger and joblessness are all too familiar. The violence against bodies and livelihoods causes us to bleed the same.

So I will stand with you--use my body as a barricade in allegiance with yours.

Against the violence of militarism, capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy and homophobia.

Against the violence of war, the destruction of land, and the rape of bodies.

No, **I will not occupy**, but I will stand with you. I will chant slogans and hold signs because together, if you listen and I speak, we can end occupation.

[i stop and climb on top of a stopped maintenance truck, look back, and the mass of marchers are still coming from around the corner, hundreds, maybe even thousands.. and they dont stop... i start to see the diversity of people, the wide range of folks, reppin all kinds of communities, it doesn't feel like what i felt in downtown... this felt different... drummers and singers, protest chants and freedom calls, babies on shoulders, union workers, teachers, youth, elders... I mean, they were all at downtown too, but here they were all moving in one direction, focused on one task - to get there...]

and soon my feelings of uneasiness and skepticism were replaced with a deep sense of satisfaction that something incredible happened today, and we made a noise that will be heard around the world...]

Ours is a revolution cradled by love and carried by hope. We're adjusting the sails so that when the earth shakes and the seas howl, we move. We rise not with, but against, the wind, the gasping earth, commoditized congresspeople, and the pagantry of punditry. We're beginning to remember what we've known all along, that revolution is little more than the intentional removal of tacit consent to power. Withdraw consent, redraw intent.

Let us hold the space.

Let us hold our selves

And each other

Together.

Words by: Ziza Delgado, Marcelo Garzo, Peter Kim, Christopher Petrella, Kim Tran
Photo by: Peter Kim Layout by: Peter Kim, Kim Tran, Marcelo Garzo

*Puar, Jasbir. Queer Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. Print.