

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewees: Matt Manalo

Interviewers: Chelsey Wen

Date of Interview: June 12, 2020

Transcribed by: Chelsey Wen

Edited by: Sonia He

Audio Track Time: 1:06:44

Background: Matt Manalo was born and raised in the Philippines before moving to Houston in 2004. He studied Computer Engineering before graduating from the University of Houston with a BFA in Painting in 2006. He is now a full time artist who takes advantage of the city of Houston's diverse environment as a source for inspiration. He has several community based projects and businesses, including Filipinx Artists of Houston and the Alief Art House. With a passion for building a community, Manalo hopes to provide a platform for future artists. Manalo agreed to this interview in order to talk about his projects, COVID-19, how he has adapted to the current environment, and the future of the art scene in Houston.

Setting: Matt Manalo took the interview in his home over the video conference software Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key:

MM: Matt Manalo

CW: Chelsey Wen

—: speech stammers

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions - laughs, sighs, etc.

Interview transcript:

CW : Okay, so today is June 12, and I'm with HAAA. My name is Chelsey Wen, interviewing Matt Manalo. So the first question is, can you talk about founding Filipinx Artists of Houston and what your vision for it is?

MM: Um, Filipinx Artists of Houston. We founded it last year, June last year, so it's almost about a year now. Originally, you know, because I've just been an artist, you know, kind of like working for myself and making work for myself, I've always had that emptiness of, you know, community and being able to share things. I mean, I did have a Filipino community, it's just there wasn't anything that was just mainly focused on art. So yeah, the-- I attended a Filipino art show at Asia Society at Texas. And I was able to meet Bridgette Bray there, who's the curator and, and then I brought up the whole idea of like, "Hey, you know, we have we also have Filipino artists here in Houston and I would love you know, to work with you and, and maybe Asia Society could be a part of it."

And um so, she was really interested in starting that conversation and, and they've been, they've been really supportive. And they even provided us, you know, a space to meet at every month. So we've been meeting there and the goal really is, the main goal is representation. And then also, I wanted to create an environment where Filipino artists could be, could rely on their artistic practices as a form of income and in financial stability in that. Especially that there has never been a Filipino arts community in Houston before. So this is like the very first one. And yeah, also, you know, just to change, I mean, we've had this conversation before just to change the whole idea of Filipinos being, you know, in other jobs, you know, not just nurses or teachers. I wanted to also open the eyes of a lot of parents so that they can be supportive of their kids who wants to be artists in the future. So yeah.

CW: Cool. So do you guys plan events or I don't know seminars or something?

MM: Mhm. Yeah. We've already had a couple of film showings, we've sponsored some showings, and then we've had poetry readings. We've invited big name authors to do some book or poetry reading here in Houston. We've done talks, seminars, and then right now where we're trying to raise some money and work with NafCon, Texas, to you know, via art auction, so that we could help the J1 workers, and how they you know, they've been affected by the pandemic.

CW: What are J1 workers?

MM: They are basically, they're workers who are currently here in Houston, and they're all over the country, but we're working to help the ones here in Houston, particularly, they're here on a

work visa, but then it's sort of like an exchange student kind of thing. So their visa-visa is only valid through their employment. So they're, they've been working here at the Marriott. So, and because of the pandemic, you know, that the hotel industry has really been affected by it. So they weren't able to get any kind of income through this whole pandemic. So, you know, we wanted to reach out and help out in any way we can.

CW: Mhm. Um, so kind of related to that. Do you-- Are there any, what kind of government resources or aid would you like to see, like during this pandemic?

MM: Um, I just recently saw news of the Education Secretary saying no to financial aid for DACA holders. I think that's very unfortunate. Because, you know, as, as we would like to see our country, you know, talk about how we-we're kind of like a melting pot of everyone. So I think it's also important that even DACA holders should be able to have access to these financial helps, especially within the pandemic. Because they are here to better themselves and, and to you know, make the country better in their own ways. So yeah, I'd like to see more support and, and more in inclusivity in the government to, to... to help I mean even undocumented immigrants who are here and are working. I wish to see more of that.

CW: Mhm. Um, so I also saw that you started Alief Art House. Can you talk about that?

MM: Um, Alief Art House also kind of began at the same, almost the same time as the Filipinx Artists of Houston. It is a project from my fellowship with diverse works called Project Relief Fellowship. And I was able to acquire this space with the help of International District of Houston, which is, you know, the people managing Alief. Alief is known as the most diverse district here in Houston. And there's a lot of culture already going on like feed and other festivals but there really hasn't anything that was also focused on art. So I decided to purchase a shipping container and put it in the middle of the community garden space and you know activate the art scene in Alief over there. So yeah, it's a-it's basically an art space where we get to showcase art by black, indigenous--black, indigenous, people of color, residents of Alief.

And we and then we try to be really inclusive with our programming, you know also including artists who are part of CTPUC and yeah, just trying to activate art in-in-in the neighborhood and and and just see what kind of change we can bring. It's almost like like my goal for Filipinx arts of Houston is almost the same as the Alief Art House because it's it's based off of the whole idea of kapitbahay, which is a Tagalog term for or being basically like a good neighbor. So-So trying to be supportive of artists here is Alief in terms of being able to support them with their practice. And, and yeah, be able to showcase their-their creativity that is, you know, not having to go out of the neighborhood. So, you know, we can think about not having, you know, like costs of

travel and all that and maybe shipping of artwork or something like that. So, so yeah, um it's community based art space.

CW: Mhm. So what kind of events do you guys hold there?

MM: For my first year, with Diverse Works, I did some arts workshop as well as featuring the residents of Alief and also people who are deeply rooted in the community. And then I also collaborated with local creatives. Um so I had for four events. The first one was People of Alief, so kind of like people of-- Humans of New York you know, with a photo and then a little quotation from, from, from the people that we interviewed and, and we were basically asking why they love Alief and what, what it means to them to be a part of the, of the neighborhood. And then the second one was a community weaving. And we, the, the artists who I worked with Danny Nguyen who's an inter-internationally known fashion designer, he built a giant loom for us. And, uh, you know, the whole event was basically community weaving. We, we were trying to weave the community, symbolically, and you know, literally through that. And then and then we also had an event where we did like card making and cyanotypes. Yeah. Yeah, that's it so far. And then for this year, we've worked with another local artist, Thomas Tran. And this is through installations with the Art League of Houston. And I'm collaborating with Antonius Bui, so Thomas painted a new mural for the Alief Art House and then he is showcasing some of his works as an illustrator inside the space. And then you know, it's going to be a whole year program-- of programming till January of next year.

CW: So when you started thinking about becoming an artist, did you expect that you would have such a strong presence in the community and like building a community?

MM: Um honestly, not really because when I started becoming an artist, I was just really thinking about myself and what kind of message I was going to put out there. You know, what kind of work I was planning to make and what kind of you know, like artistic presence that I was going to, to have. So most of it was just basically about myself. And as I said earlier, it was from that emptiness that I felt like, you know, I feel like there as like a higher calling for me. And that I needed to work with, with, with more people and and be able to-- almost like the whole idea of being somebody that I needed when I was starting off. So, yeah, so you know, sharing opportunities, knowledge, you know, of what I've experienced in the art world, you know, working as an artist for al-- for more than 10 years. Yeah, and then, you know, through that I'm also constantly learning and being humbled with, with, with other people's works and knowledge. So it's a very it's a very mutual experience to have, to be working with community. But yeah, I never realized or never even thought about you know, building that.

CW: Hm. How do you think it's changed the way you make art or think about it?

MM: It definitely changed the way I see art as because, you know, when I started, I, my goal was just, you know, like, okay, make work. Make sure you're talking to the right people, and then get into the right places, and then eventually be exhibited in the museum. That was my goal. Now my goal is to make work and if I can, you know, have a foot in, and then bring everyone else with it, with me, you know. [laughs] And, but then in terms of like my personal art practice at whole-- it, it also you know, change the way like, almost like the value of my work because, because I'm also working with communities and that means also there will be a lot of times where we will be you know, maybe exchanging work or you know, just for fun or, or like, like, let's say like the art auction that we're doing for the J1 workers and basically making my work more accessible for everyone.

Rather than it just being in a gallery or a museum where it's kind of like not accessible to everyone, where it's where, it's a white space that is almost intimidating to be in. So that was also part of like the whole idea with the Alief Art House is I want-I wanted everyone to be to be able to access art. You know, I mean, being in a neighborhood that's really diverse, some, or most of the residents haven't even probably been inside the museum, you know, or they've never stepped inside the museum because of that whole elitist factor attached to it, almost, where you get judged if you don't look like them or, or if you don't know anything, you know, I wanted to change that and, and be able to just bring art to the neighborhood rather than the neighborhood trying to go to a museum and you know, and, and make it make--and have like a bad experience because, because of like what the whole museum or gallery expects viewers to be.

CW: Um, so how have community events in Alief change during the pandemic?

MM: It's been hard, especially with the whole you know, idea and stereotyping that the pandemic or you know, the racist ideology attached with the virus. So, you know, because Alief is also part of Chinatown, so there was a lot of-- For the Alief Art House alone, we had to cancel or we had to cancel a lot of events because of the pandemic and just following guidelines with that, but but then also, you know, some people were just worried that they would be stereotyped or, or experience some racist situation. But then you know, with the Alief Art House, we had to figure out a way where we can still support the artist as well as be able to kind of like uplift the, the neighborhood as well. In some way, so Thomas really did a good job of, of putting the mural that's really colorful and, you know, it gives hope to whoever's passing by, because you can see it from the street. So anyone who's driving by could see it.

And, you know, in that way, we're still activating the art and-and something visual, something that's different. And then on my side, because I'm running the space, I kind of like acquired a new skill of like video documenting and and making like a video or putting together like a video for for Thomas, you know, so that I could also kind of showcase his, his work properly. Even if we don't have any kind of art show opening. So yeah. Yeah, I mean, it's, it's a little difficult, especially for Chinatown businesses. You know, because I don't really go to big grocery stores, and I go to the Asian grocery stores and there's really not a lot of folks that go even at, even at this time. It's not as packed as it used to be, which is kind of sad. There's a couple of small shops that I know who are just closing, you know, and they've been around for like more than 20 years. It's kind of sad that they're getting affected that way. Um...

CW: So, how much of your work has been transitioned to Zoom and FaceTime? And how does that compare to in person stuff?

MM: Oh it's been really hard. I'm the type of person who doesn't really like being in front of a computer a lot. I get headaches. And you know, that's just one of the things that I try to limit my, my computer use. But I've been doing a lot of like webinars and, and, and talks through Zoom, even like a performance that I did with Common Field. So yeah, a lot of it has been Zoom based, which is really sad because I like doing stuff in person, and being able to see the person being able to-- Or be you know, within a community. And then with that idea as well then you know, because my work is very physical, like it demands physical space and and almost making want the audience to, to touch them or experience them, so that has been difficult as well. But I've, I've also been trying my hands on digital work, and I've been enjoying it so far. Just trying to see different avenues of I can-of where I can express my thoughts or ideas in the digital realm or internet sphere. It's been good so far. I mean, I'm learning a lot definitely. [laughs]

CW: Do you mean like digital illustration?

MM: Um more of like animation and video based work. Like a lot of video editing or like music or something like that. Using old tourism videos of Philippines. Yeah, I mean, it's been fun. It's just, you know, I'm used to really interacting with people in person. So, I mean, our first interview was in person, so that was different, you know, and but, yeah, it it definitely, the whole pandemic has changed the way as I've seen art and I've accessed art, so it also made me you know, think about how I make work and question like, is my work really accessible? If you know what if it was somebody who didn't have Instagram or what if it was somebody who didn't have internet access, then how am I able to make my work accessible? So yeah, hopefully we'll figure things out. Those are still questions that I have in my head, you know? Yeah. [chuckles]

CW: Do you think that being in the pandemic has forced you to learn new things or become more creative?

MM: Um, yes and no. Yes, you know, because like, like what I said earlier with, with the new digital work, or a series that I've been making. It kind of forced me to, to, to just really sit down in and explore more digital tools rather than the ones that I'm used to, working with my hands and all that. And no, because, because I'm like my, my studio is at home as well, so a lot of-- there's also a lot of family time and, you know, different priorities at home that I need to attend to. So yeah, it's just a matter of like really getting to sit down and, and make sure that I'm putting enough time and balancing everything. Unlike before where, you know, you know, like the kids are at school, then I have all the time for myself to make work. Yeah, then it's been completely different.

CW: Um, have you seen any impacts of the pandemic on the art community in Houston?

MM: Yeah. Yeah. Because with Antonius and I, when we when we're working with our with the fellowship through installations at the Art League, we decided to switch out some of the programming money, and allocated it as a four as a, as a some sort of relief fund. And to that really fund, we-we asked people to submit like a, you know, like a three sentence, you know, like a one-one paragraph of why we should consider them. So a lot of folks have been saying that they've been misplaced, or they've lost their jobs or you know, they, they or a lot of their art gigs were canceled and all that so and so we heard like some first, first degree experiences of what these people are going through. And, and in that sense, we want to help them out through that funding. And then at the same time, we're also-- so whoever we chose, we're also going to give them a show, so they're going to be part of a group show later this year. So we can help them more, you know, whether it's an exposure through their artwork, or a sale. I mean, if they sell their work, then they get 100% of it so yeah. But then also for myself, I've lost a lot of opportunities as well. Like I was supposed to have a solo show in April, and that was postponed so yeah, you know, I'm not the only one who got affected; there's a lot more and, and probably even worse situations than me. So yeah.

CW: Are there other financial resources for artists who are suffering during this time?

MM: Um... I believe so. The main artist-- the one that provides the most or the main institution that does that Houston Arts Alliance. I think they were, but then right now that the grant, the grants are kind of closed. But for local ones at least that's that's what I know. There-There might not be any resources right now. But there are nationwide ones. And I recently applied for one, and I was able to get a little funding from that. But yeah, it's basically the whole idea of I'm also

a big believer of community care. So it's a lot of like people chipping in and, and in putting together like a fund and then redistributing that. So I've seen a couple that are specifically for artists, and you know it's almost like a no questions asked, you just need to apply kind of thing. So yeah, it's it's good to see that there are people doing more than than just you know spreading the word about it, but yet they are actually trying to help people get some funding as well.

CW: Um, have you-- are people finding other ways to get around not being able to travel or hold shows in person? Or like are there any other solutions that you've seen artists do?

MM: I've seen somebody who set up like his own house into a gallery [laughs] and, and he he basically does like an art show of his own work, which I thought was pretty cool. And then and then there's another thing of doing mail art, so they exchange-- I was part of a nationwide mail art exchange. And so in a way, you know, you're receiving real work and getting to experience it in person as well. Yeah, and mostly it's digital, you know, Instagram shows and all that. Which makes me also curious about how institutions are-are viewing or how they think about what really matters now, you know, like, is it still a valid show if it was an Instagram show or or you know, or, just the whole idea of accessibility, again, when it comes to the pandemic, and even without the pandemic, like how, how are-how is the art supposed to be shown? Or who can see it? Or who's allowed to see it? Or who's able to access that? Or, you know, it's just a lot of questions, and but I think they're good questions [laughs] which will benefit a lot of, you know, artists, especially black and people of color artists.

CW: Mhm. Um, do you think people will retain these new techniques or like these Instagram shows in the future?

MM: I hope so. Because they're fun. And and I think one of the reasons why they do that is to bring the community together. So I think that's great. And without having to-- it's almost like a really fast and cost effective way of getting work out there. So yeah, I wish to see more of it in the future. And, and because with that, I think people are also pushed to exploring new ideas of how to display the work, or how to, you know, I mean, I've seen ones where it's like a virtual reality tour, and I thought that was kind of weird, but-- because it kind of brings me back to like the 90s where virtual thing was a thing and and, [laughs] you know, as can't believe that we're kind of like bringing that back. But yeah, definitely it's, it's, it's basically pushing a lot of boundaries, you know, but that has been complacent, you know, that has been--not complacent--but static for a while now. Right, not static, but-but it changes like traditions almost, you know, like, like what I mentioned earlier, like, does the art show have to be in a gallery space to be a good art show or, you know... Or I don't know, I guess just like, how things are validated through space, money, and audience. Yeah, like you can have a show in the middle of the desert, and the whole world can see it, you know? So that really changes accessibility to a lot. You

know, and you know, or let's say you have a room in the middle of nowhere, or, or people— people wouldn't even go to because of racial stereotypes or anything like that. So, then, yeah, it just really changes a lot of things on how the work is viewed. So yeah, I want to see more of it.

CW: Um, how do you think the pandemic has changed your perspective on the future?

MM: On the future in general?

CW: Yeah.

MM: Yeah, that nothing is permanent. You know, it makes you think about the time and and how the present is more valuable than the being anxious about the future. [Both laugh] Yeah. And then, even like, in terms of like, values, it makes you think about, like, or priorities, like what it would-- like, living in Houston, you know, where everyone is really drives or commutes. It makes me--It made me realize that people are capable of working at home, you know, like, like work at home is possible. So, if, if a lot of companies that that then it'll save gas it will save, you know a lot of things and then look at that in the bigger picture is an office space really important? You know or, or you know or I don't know, I mean just like it's mostly related to capitalism and and material-material things.

So like now like, like, like with the clothes that I have you know like they're just sitting in the, in my closet, you know? And like do I really need them? [laughs] Like, you know, or do I need, let's say like, do I need like five pairs of shoes? You know, just simple stuff like that. I don't know, it really it may it makes me question a lot of things and, and made me prioritize a lot of things even more. Like I've had more time tending my-my-my garden. So, you know I want to basically just have food available and not having to pay for it and then getting my family involved in it as well. And then, and then even Filipinx Artists of Houston have, we had we kind of have like a subgroup of people who garden so we do, you know, kind of like exchange plans and try to explore our history, our our culture through that, through food. So, yeah, I mean, you really get down to the basics again and humbles you down and just think about things that really matter.

CW: Um, going back to Filipinx Artists of Houston. How has it felt to connect with so many different disciplines of art? And has that changed the way that you create art?

MM: Um because it's like the first art focused community in Houston, I want it to be inclusive as well like, through all the art practices so, so we have people involved in performing arts like

theater, or film, or you know, and we have spoken word artists, poets, writers. We have musicians, we have people who do dance and do performance art through that. And then we have the visual artists, you know, who, who do tattoos or, or do sculptures, or make paintings. So I feel like it kind of rubbed off on me a little bit. Now that I'm also doing a little bit of performance art there, and I'm making—I'm being more confident with my poetry sometimes.

And then I'm also exploring more into how my work already takes up space, but then just the whole idea of how much space that it takes up so it then it becomes more of a sculpture rather than something that hangs on the wall. And then, you know, and then within that group of artists, we also have culinary chefs and and then we get to share all of these things together. And it's, it's really humbling. Because originally, I thought that we would only be 20, and now we're like, I wasn't expecting to have like a group of people like, that's almost like 40 people, active members with all different backgrounds, with all different experiences in the art world and and it's good though, that I thought I was going to be some sort of like, teacher or, or like person who's going to guide people but then, you know at the same time I'm the one being guided, I'm being taught. So it's very humbling to, to be surrounded by people who have like so many stories to tell. And, and yeah, I mean and that's the reason why I'm just glad that it happened. Finally.
[Both laugh]

CW: Do you guys ever partner with other Filipinx organizations or other cultural organizations?

MM: Yeah, we do. We've partnered recently with the Pacific Arts Movement¹, I think and they're based in LA and then we, we co-sponsored the film showing. And then like with the J1 workers where we're collaborating with NafCon, Texas, which is a national-- well we're working with the local group, but then it's a national initiative as well. Yeah, so that's like one of the few examples that we've worked with several, not only arts organizations, but pretty much whoever wants to collaborate with us, we try to, you know, try to support as much as we can.

CW: Um, what do you think the pandemic has revealed about structural inequalities in our society?

MM: I think it made people see more of it. You know, like because then it made us-- It made us think about like all the money that's being spent on other things when, when really we need money or funding for-for natural-natural disasters or or for-or for just health related services for everyone. You know, unfortunately our city mayor still wants to give more than a billion dollars to the police, which I think is absurd, I think-I think that we should focus all that money to social

¹ The interviewee clarifies this to be the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival instead.

services, because that's also part of like what the pandemic has exposed is that, you know, we need we need the services support, you know, mental health care and, and, and just services for- for everyone who needs it. And maybe we'll be able to lower down the-the chances of black people getting killed, you know, within the hands of the police. Um yeah, I mean, that was already one thing that we were dealing with, and then and then it kind of exposed it even more, you know, with it with-with George Floyd's death. So yeah, you know, I mean, there needs to be some structural change for sure. And-and I wish, you know, the, the city mayor would be, would listen to his people since he is the public servant whose serving the public, rather than thinking about capitalizing on the diversity of the city, I think, especially that it's most diverse than you should be listening to all the different cultures and different voices that our community has, yeah.

CW: What role do you think Asian Americans have played in the Black Lives Matter movement?

MM: Um it's-it's it's an ugly and beautiful at the same time. Ugly because for the longest time, we've worked so hard to be the model minority, but also beautiful that we're finally trying to take a stand and, and be there for our black brothers and sisters. You know? I mean, that's one of the reasons why there was an Asian guy at the movie "Get Out", you know, because we were the most white leaning minorities and being part of that doesn't really help uplifting the black lives and you know, for me, as an as part of being Asian, it's my responsibility to, to change that and to be there and to have the right knowledge and resources to be able to, you know, even like, with like just talking to my family about it, and trying to make them see what black folks go through every day or even, even at the time where they were born, you know, they already experienced a lot of injustices. Yeah, I mean, I talk about it in my work already about colorism and how, you know, because Filipinos are also huge on anti-blackness and, and it's sad that I'm part of that community, but then it also motivates me to think that I have a greater responsibility of, of changing that, and making my own-my own Filipino folks to see that we shouldn't be against them, you know, that we need to help them be free because it's only-- because I believe that if we liberate black lives and all of us will be free. Yeah.

CW: Um, how do you think the community can work to alter these dangerous viewpoints of colorism and things like that?

MM: I think one of the first things we should do is acknowledge our privilege and know it and learn it and learn from it and, and see what that privilege is. And then through that, we need to learn the tools of how we can really highlight black voices. I mean, you know, the resources are already out there. And they've even like, you know, black folks have even like spoon fed us, all of these things. It's just a matter of like really acknowledging what we have and-and taking advantage of those resources that's already been put out there for us to learn and to practice. And

then, you know, after doing that self-work, then-then we can start within our families and then you know, once we've done it with our families and you can work on our community and doing that. But I think yeah, I think really focusing on, on doing the self-work first is the most important. Uh...

CW: Do you think that George Floyd's death and protests have caused a shift in how Asian Americans think about this or their role in this?

MM: Yeah. Yes. And and I hope so, because I can't speak for everyone. Yes, because I'm-I'm seeing a lot of Asian Americans being more vocal about their solidarity and have created spaces for us to learn, and be able to point out that privilege that we have. And you know, even, even calling each other out, I think is huge. And just having those conversations, even if they're difficult. I mean, we're even putting out resources on how to speak to your parents, you know, about racism, they even come in, like, different languages. So I think I think we as a community are really trying our best, you know, I mean, we don't, we don't need to get applauded for that, because that's something that we owe to the black folks who've, who've lost their lives and who've broken their backs to build this country up and not getting any kind of recognition for it. So, yeah, I hope we keep doing that without expecting any kind of recognition because it's not really about us. You know, the fight isn't about us. And yeah, I mean, I've even just, like within my Facebook Timeline alone, like I would post something, and then like an uncle would come in, or a friend would comment like, "oh, like, that is not true. Blah blah blah," and then just having those difficult conversations, I think we'll at least start something, you know, like plant the seed and see how it grows, kind of thing. Yeah, I mean, we're working. It's good to see that.

CW: Um, do you think the art community has role in uplifting the black community?

MM: Oh, yeah. Yeah, huge, I think has a huge role. Because, you know, one way of doing that is providing, you know, space for them to display their creativity. And another way would be supporting their creativity by collecting their work or looking at their work. And yeah, I mean, just, just the whole idea of being supportive in so many ways, I think will, will benefit that because, you know, and then that's where we think about structures as well. Like if, if Black artists are able to have a comfortable income, just through their art then, just by being supported through their art, then you know, then then they don't really have to, like force themselves in uncomfortable spaces. You know, you know a lot of galleries out there don't even have any black artists represented their roster, or museums don't even have a lot of black artists in their collection.

So. So this whole incident with George Floyd's death has a changed a lot of like these institutions and how they can be more supportive. I know that Manila just acquired a piece from a black artist I know in town. And so yeah, I mean, there's so many ways that we can do that. And, and I'm glad that people are really opening their eyes to all these possibilities that that a black artists can can make a living out of his own work. That there's an audience for it, there's that there's a way that they can express themselves even better. Yeah, I mean, you know, just to have just to have the idea that there's a community that supports you for your work, then I think, I think it's really important.

CW: Um, so are you optimistic about the future?

MM: Yeah, I am. [chuckles]

CW: Do you think there are lessons that we're learning during this pandemic that will help you or help the art community in the future?

MM: Yeah, I mean, because thinking about that that, I've been thinking about that recently, and and I was just having thoughts of, you know, like, if, if I think that, then there's probably more than one of me out there. So that makes me hopeful and optimistic about the future. And then you know, like, what we talked about earlier, just the whole structure of the art world is being questioned within this pandemic. And even like with George Floyd's death. Um, a lot of galleries and institutions are opening their eyes to a rich source of creativity, you know, through black artists that they've just been ignoring this whole time when they've been making work. They've been existing this whole time. Yeah, I'm hopeful. You know I mean, one of the main reasons I'm doing the work that I do is because because I want my kids to have a good future, or to have a future that where we can't, I mean, I'm sure it's still gonna exist, but we're racism isn't a thing.

Or, you know, like, racial inequality isn't a thing because my kids are, you know, people of color. So I know they're not going to benefit from white privilege in any way. Um so, yeah, and a lot of my friends are also parents and, and they have the same goals for their kids. So being surrounded by people who have the same priorities, makes me more hopeful. And they're also artists. So, you know, that also gives me hope for the world. You know, I mean, within the span of five years, we've-- somebody like I forgot, I forgot his first name characters who owns Safari Land who provides the tear gas that the police has been using, stepped down out of the Whitney, of being the border Whitney, and then and then he mentioned recently that he's also stepping out of the whole tear gas business. So, I mean, we're seeing some changes.

CW: Um, do you talk to your kids about race in America?

MM: Yeah. Yeah, I do. Um, it's easier to talk to my 15 year old about it. Because, you know, she experiences it. With my six year old, it's getting there you know, he doesn't quite grasp the whole idea yet but yeah. Like, I mean, with, even with just like simple questions like he meant, he-- there was one time where he said like "Daddy, you're so brown." And then I said, "Yeah, I'm, I'm very brown, and I'm proud of it." You know, that's what I always tell them. And he, he even repeats it, that I'm really proud of it. And so, I mean, those are just one of the instances, that are small things that I can help him see. You know, the whole idea of race and whites, they know a thing and, I mean, I-- even like when we play games. I always pick like, a person of color as like the main character or, you know, or, or I, I let him watch shows where it's a more diverse, you know, character selection, and, you know, like, it's not just like, key men where everyone's just white er, you know? [laughs] But yeah. But then I think also part of that is like changing the whole way that we used the term black. Like it's been used for centuries as like something negative, right, like Black Plague or, or black market, you know, just like how it's always-- it always means like something negative. So I think I think if we could change the whole idea or how we use the term black, then I think that's also like one simple way of uplifting the black lives.

CW: Um, do you think-- Do you think the Filipinx community has been affected more heavily during the pandemic because a large portion of the population is like involved in nursing or like health care?

MM: Uh. Yeah, I mean, my dad's a first responder. So yeah, I mean, it, you know, just affected in a way where we're at a higher risk. And I don't know, I've been hearing a lot of like different stories where, you know, a lot of-- a lot of like Filipino folks don't even want to do nursing anymore just because the pandemic has made it like extra difficult for them. And then it's just, yeah, I mean, you know, just alone, just my dad alone being a first responder makes me worry about him and worry about my mom because you know, and because he has to go home to my mom every day then—with-- being high risk to getting my mom who's immunocompromised kind of like makes me worry about that all the time. And yeah, just the whole idea that a lot of Filipino folks are first responders. I think affected-affects them, affects us in that sense. I haven't really heard of any Filipinos in the medical field who's been laid off or anything. So I think that's, that's how we're dealing with that, I think.

CW: Um, is there anything else you want to say in the interview?

MM: Oh I think one thing I would like to say is that being Asians or Filipinos, Pacific Islanders, we have a lot of work to do. And, and, and especially, that we suffer from the whole idea of being that model minority, I think it's our responsibility to, to really work so hard and uplift black lives in any way that we can. And that really starts off within ourselves. So, you know, it's a lot of work. It's not easy, but we can do it. Because, like what I said earlier, when black lives are free, then we will be free.

CW: Mhm. Well, thank you so much for talking with me.

MM: Yeah, thank you Chelsey.

CW: Yeah.

[Interview ends.]