

Houston Asian American Archive (HAAA)
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Anthony Pabillano
Interviewers: Ann Shi, Zoe Clark
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Transcribed by: Sonia He, Youngbin Lee
Edited by: Ann Shi, Sonia He, Helen Pu
Audio Track Time: 1hr 52min

Background:

Anthony Pabillano immigrated from the Philippines to the US during his teenage years, which was quite a turbulent memory for him and became one of the inspirations for his later artistic creativity. He pursued an undergraduate degree in Accounting in Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi, TX and a Master's degree in University of Texas at Austin. Upon graduation, he became an Advisory Forensic and Litigation professional, for which he works full-time; in his spare time he immerses himself in creating art. He is particularly drawn to paper art, which he was initially inspired by Henri Matisse due to art classes in high school.

Besides art and accounting, his diverse interests in life include mathematics (in particular geometry), architecture and increasingly, community contribution. He serves as a Board Member and Treasurer at the Visual Art Alliance, and is one of the 32 artist members of a locally well-known co-op gallery, the Archway Gallery. He also volunteers for various social causes, one of which due to his roots and connection to the Philippines, the "Filipinx Artists of Houston" group; and others such as "Drawing from the Wound", an art collective of seven artists addressing their personal stories of grief through art.

Setting: This interview took place in the Digital Media Commons in the basement of Fondren Library at Rice University.

Key:

AP: Anthony Pabillano

AS: Ann Shi

ZC: Zoe Clark

—: speech stammers

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

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

Interview transcript:

AS: So here with me today we have a special guest who is an artist from the Philippines and his name is Anthony Pabillano. And on the other side of the camera, my name is Ann Shi.

ZC: My name is Zoe Clark. And we're interviewing Anthony for the A— Houston Asian American Archive on March 8th, 2019— 2020. [AP laughs]

AS: Thank you so much for being with us today.

AP: No, thank you for having me. It's an honor.

AS: And happy birthday!

AP: I appreciate it.

AS: Did you have fun last night?

AP: Oh yeah. Well I stayed home. [laughs] [ZC: Oh well that's very nice.] And slept. [laughs]

ZC: That's a good birthday.

AP: Yeah you know I had a first—yeah I was planning on you know having dinner outside, but I just had a headache, and late afternoon I just decided, "Oh, I'll just stay home." [laughs]

AS: Good idea. So could you tell us a little bit about your upbringing?

AP: Okay so I'm from the Philippines. I was born there. Um, okay I was there until I moved to America in 2000, November 2000, actually Thanksgiving Day, uh, on that year. Um... upbringing there was a little bit tough. [nervous chuckles] Uh you know my mom and dad, you know, they were together, and my mom, my parents had a store, a general store. And it was pretty successful, just a local retail store. Mostly groceries, et cetera. And— and my mom had the opportunity to come to America back in 1992, I think, back in 1992, and he was able to bring— she was able to bring my brother with her. Uh, my dad and my two sisters weren't able to go at that time, because only my mom and my older brother, elder brother was able to be petitioned to come. And after that, my dad [chuckles] you know he did his best to you know raise my two sisters and me. Um, my mom was, you know, [chuckles] sending money back to the Philippines. Uh, things happened to the point were my dad was not able to get those, you know, funds coming in. Uh, it was kind of a difficult time.

Eventually, my dad had you know lost the business, had to find odd jobs here and there to support my siblings and me. Uh we... we went, essentially we lost contact with the family from over here. That's probably the reason why I love what I'm doing now in terms of a day job. Which is fraud accounting et cetera, uh I can tell you more about that later. But um, so we went through very difficult times [laughs] moved to other places in terms of one house to another. Um, that my dad did some welding jobs here and there, and ended up being a motorcycle ferry driver. Like you know those tricycles, like basically a

motorbi— motorbicycle with a side car along— attached to it. And he would ferry people here and there. Uh from one location to another.

So he did that uh, and eventually in the late 90's you know family from America was able to get in touch with us and my mom saw the situation and realized that, you know, we went into that sort of life. [chuckles] The process happened to get my sisters and me here; we were able to come here in 2000. And my dad wasn't able to come at that time, but there were plans to eventually petition him to come here, but sadly he passed away a year later. [AS: Oh, sorry.] Oh no, it's okay. Been a long time. So yeah... uh... sorry, I don't mean to tell a, you know... share a very sad story.

ZC: Oh no, it's a part of your life, so we want to hear it.

AP: Thank you.

AS: Thank you for sharing.

AP: Appreciate it.

ZC: What did your mom do when she was in the US?

AP: When she was into US so she was able to come here because one of my aunts from my mom's side, she was married to a Phillipino Coast Guard, and he was... I don't know the full story, but he was able to become or start— he was able to go into the US Coast Guard, and then you know that aunt was able to get my grandparents to come to the US. Then my grandparents got my mom and elder brother into here. And when my mom came into America, um she worked odd jobs here and there. She had... you know she... this is her story so I don't want to share too much. But I think she'll be fine with me saying that, you know, she was able to finish high school and no education beyond that. So when she came into America, she worked as odd jobs here and there. She initially worked at a convent, you know cleaning in terms of janitorial services at night cleaning the floors et cetera. She ended up working for a hotel, you know, cleaning crew then became a waitress. And then she ended up working at— at this little res— not really a restaurant but a food place, a fast food place. It was a one-person— it's an interesting place because it's a one person, uh little building. And you know the person would be— she would be the person cooking and taking orders. I forget the name of the place, but it was in Corpus Christi. I'd have to ask her. So yeah, she worked odd jobs here and there, mostly as a waitress.

AS: Did she have any support from anyone in Corpus Christi?

AP: Oh yeah. It's um... it's her story to tell but uh, I think she'll be fine with me saying— sharing this story. But, luckily, you know, a benefactor essentially came into her life. And that benefactor has since then passed away, sadly, he was the one who is— was able to help my mom out in terms of getting the rest of, you know, the rest of my siblings and me, here. So, um, I'm very thankful of that help, because I don't know my mom being a waitress in multiple places, she had three jobs at one time for a period of time, uh, she has told us. And I don't know it would be enough to... you know to have a basis you know, to tell the US government she would be able to fully support us here, we were able to come here. But I'm thankful.

AS: We can talk about that later but uh I'm very interested in the work that you had a lot of female figures and that's why I asked about your mother, and I felt like for a female figure, your mother is the first person to be impacting the children, like subconsciously. [**AP:** Yeah.] We can talk about that later.

AP: In terms of me and my artwork, there is a lot of female figures in my— my work. [**AS:** Yeah, it's so interesting.] That's very... very insightful of you to make that connection. Yeah, it's one reason why I portray a lot of female figures in my work. Yeah. [chuckles]

AS: Yeah so... did you learn English before coming to America?

AP: Oh I did yeah. So Philippines has a dual national language, uh Tagalog, or Filipino, and then English. So then ever since growing up, you know, English has always been a part of our—our—our language. I never really learned it... you know, because you know, we would be taught English, you know simple words, simple sentence construction. But in terms of application, you know, speaking English fluently, in a conversation, it wasn't really... I didn't get that experience back then. I actually learned Po— uh well I learned English through watching Pokemon back then. [laughs] Because you know they never translated that to... to Tagalog. But yeah, growing up in the 90's, I was able to learn a lot of my English through that cartoon. [laughs] And then you— coming to America and you know us, very young about ten years old, I was able to quickly pick up English. Luckily I was young enough to, when I came here.

ZC: Do you remember like kind of your first years— like your first year or so in America? Can you tell us about it?

AP: Yeah... Came here fourth grade, part of that year, and then fifth grade, spent, you know, a year. And then 9/11 happened around that time. It was still, I was still very young back then to the— the point that I can't really remember much of it. Uh I just remember, you know, just the time I had with my fam— my immediate family. I was brought up really sheltered. I never really went out, you know, outside of school, I never really spent time outside with friends at that, I was very... you know growing up as an introvert I was very... I kind of enjoyed just being you know at home, reading, studying, and things like that. Uh yeah, I can't really remember much of my first year, other than school.

AS: So why did you study accounting?

AP: Uh actually that was not my original plan. Growing up, I've always been drawn... well, I grew up... well, through schooling, I was kind of uh— I was very studious back then. Um, actually some of the documents I brought are things related to achievements I was able to uh— to obtain through math and science and all those various competitions I was able to participate in state and national levels. Um so I wanted to infuse my love of math and science with my love of art, back then and architecture really... uh drew me in. Uh I remember growing up here in America I would be watching Discovery, the HGTV channel. [chuckles] I was always drawn to that. Uh and I wanted to become an architect and I studied that for a year or so in college. Uh wasn't able to. Things happened in like, you know. I was at Ohio State (University) for a bit studying architecture, went back to Corpus Christi uh because I felt— I— I felt kind of alone over there. I didn't know anyone, it's a different environment all together. It was cold, coming from the Philippines, living most of my life in South Texas, I've always been used to the heat. And snow and cold is not, it's not fair, uh bode well in terms of my interests.

So I went back here. I went to Corpus Christi. I transferred to the university there. Uh there's no architecture program there, so I had to switch. And both my sisters studied accounting at that university and they're both accountants, and my older sister kind of uh convinced me to go into that route and I did. And I'm luck—I'm happy that I went into that. Ever since I took my first accounting class, uh you know accounting it's not really... a passion per se. But in that first accounting class, um I... what got me interested was the application, or the study of accounting frauds, of big accounting scandals that occurred in the US in the early 2000's and the late, uh like late Au— 2008, 2007— 9 financial crisis at that time. Um, so I've always— so after you know getting exposed to that I've always had the idea to apply that accounting degree in— in a forensic or fraud accounting capacity.

ZC: Which university did you attend?

AP: Uh Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi or— and then I finished my undergrad there. And then one of the internships, well the people at the internship I was doing at the time convinced me to get a Master's Degree. In the meantime, while the hiring freeze ended, I ended up going to, applying and got accepted to the accounting program at UT Austin.

ZC: So how did you get your internship with the FBI?

AP: Oh okay, yeah so uh we went... uh through then my interests, when my interest for the accounting started to develop, um one of the first things I researched was, you know, jobs that I could apply that into and et cetera. Through various research I ended up looking at the FBI website and their need and their desire to hire accountants. [laughs] That piqued my interest. I started researching a little bit more and I found that they have an internship program; and I decided, why not? I'll try, I'll put my application in. And that was I think, trying to remember, 2011 fall time was when I submitted my application. Um and then I didn't hear back... well I—I heard back mul—sporadically throughout the time but officially I got the uh the internship offer in June of the following year.

Took a long time because you know they usually, even though it was an internship position, it... they... the process that we went through in terms of background investigation was the same level as any other FBI employee. They call it the "full scope" background investigation. And it took a while, because they had to, you know, interview the people that had been exposed to back in the Philippines; and you know growing up in Corpus Christi and et cetera. Took a while. They did... I don't know what kind of... how many interviews that they performed... got that offer and then did the internship at the FBI Houston Field Office.

Um because of my accounting education, they assigned me to the criminal investigative division specifically in the healthcare fraud squad, because they had a need for extra hands that summer, so I was able to help out. The agent I was assigned to, to shadow— as an intern we were assigned to one agent to shadow. And then, I enjoyed that, it was one summer, and that summer of 2012, I was in Houston, uh, 290 and 43rd (Street), I believe, yeah. And I guess they liked me, [laughs] so they extended my internship to, to the Corpus Christi FBI Office so I could finish my last year of undergrad. And um... and during that 2012-ish time period or so, there were a lot of you know... in the federal government, there was a lot of hiring freezes occurring, not just at the FBI but other federal agencies, and then they said they said, they

suggested, “What if you get a Master’s degree in the meantime? Wait out the freeze.” So I did. I applied, got into the top accounting program at UT, their master’s program.

Um because that’s the top accounting program in the nation, companies go there to recruit instead of you know students going out and finding jobs on their own. Then during the recruiting process that’s when I found out that they... there’s something similar in the private role, in terms of forensics services and applying accounting in that kind of fraud mindset. And you know so I ended up being picked up by my former employ— employment at Pricewaterhousecoopers. I worked there for five years in their forensics services group and now I’m in another firm also in forensics services.

ZC: So I guess going back to your time in the FBI, were there many other Asians or Filipinos at—during your time there?

AP: Good qu— uh yeah. Ye— um hm. Hm ye... In terms of the group that I was in, I was the only one. Expanding that to the other squads, yeah didn’t really see... yeah I never really thought about that but I know for a fact there were Asians. [laughs] They’re mostly in the, the translation group. Uh I don’t know specifically what their department is called. But I know for a fact that there were... because there was always— logically there is a need for law enforcement to have those language capabilities, translation capabilities. So they’re in a different area of the building that I never got exposed to.

ZC: So what was it like working for Pricewaterhousecoopers? I know it’s a very big company.

AP: Yeah, it’s a big corpo— international firm. Um I did... at first, you know, while I was in the recruiting process. The reason why I went with them was because uh the department was small enough, it was around 20 when I joined. Even though it was a big firm, I didn’t feel lost. [laughs] Because I— I—the group was small enough to the point you know I was able to, you know, build, in my opinion, very genuine relationship with every single one. Um, I enjoyed that yeah, the company opened a lot of doors for me and gave me a lot of opportunities. Uh yes, you are probably aware or you have friends who are in that world, it can get pretty stressful. [chuckles] Uh at one point, I had three projects that I was juggling at one time, even though I was just an associate. But you know I grew very quickly uh in my few years there. And um, just I take a lot of positives from that experience. Um even though at times it was, got stressful to the point that you know. One of the reasons why I left, was the last year and a half that I was there, I was travelling constantly. And kind of a homebody, and then there’s me and my friends are in Houston. And um, that— that part of missing out on events happening in town et cetera and spending time with them. It got to me. Eventually, traveling is not my life. [laughs] I will travel here and there, I won’t mind it; but every week, every other, you know, every—one week after another... yeah it took a toll.

AC: So did you find time to make art in your work?

AP: During that time it was tough. I even brought my supplies with me wherever I went. Uh luckily I— I work with paper so I was able to you know, you know they’re flat and I can get a lot of paper with me. And their footprint would be very small. My supplies are you know just scissors, pencils, rulers, glue and tape. Uh and rul— other various miscellaneous tools. So I was able to do some work whenever I’m out of town; but by the time, you know I— I get out of work, wherever that is, I was at that time I was, I was

mentally exhausted. So I would just, I would just not do art; I would just sleep [laughs] in the hotel room and eat... ate dinner, ate dinner first somewhere and then just crashed.

ZC: Um did you travel mostly nationally or did you go internationally?

AP: I just nationally, yeah and on the east coast with the first project that I had to travel to was... well actually it was in Santa Fe and then—but that was only for two week and then um... then the New York area and then the Seattle area and then... [laughs] The last project that I was in was in the San Antonio.

AS: So did you find you were used to travelling because of your travels? [**AP:** What—] That you travelled so much, did you find nowadays travelling is easier to cope with?

AP: Um I—I hm... what do you mean like cope? Yeah, yeah I would say traveling is not yet a big issue yet. It's easier to cope with now. Um but it—I would rather be travelling if it were for personal [laughs] reasons you know, vacations et cetera. But work yeah it's yeah... it's fine. [laughs]

AS: Perhaps we can move on to talk a little bit about your art?

AP: Oh okay.

AS: Yep and so how did you start with paper? How—why is that the medium that you chose?

AP: Oh okay. Um well paper yeah... sometimes I think about you know, when specifically I fell in love with paper. But I would say the very concrete memory is in, you know high school. Uh because my art teacher assigned a Hen—a Henry Matisse inspired artwork project. You know where you know she would assign a project for us to cut paper essentially and do it in a style and also infuse our own, uh you know—our own styles also in using paper to create our works. Uh so that was the beginning, that was the genesis that I can think of, that I can remember of me cutting paper to make an artwork. And then, during high school, uh I did AP Art Portfolio program so we had to create a portfolio by the time we graduate. Uh then submit it to the AP board, and then it got graded; and then we got college credits for doing that. Um my AP portfolio concentration was in figurative work. Um, it was specifically on the stu—study of phobia. Different kinds of phobias.

Um so I've always had that proclivity in rendering the human body since then and... you know given that you know we did that Matisse project at that... you know around that time. Started cutting paper, and then my art teacher brought up, uh, box of wall paper scraps that she got from somewhere, and then I started cutting that and then I fell in love with the—the different, you know, the different motifs and the designs and the scrap paper and... saw, you know, clothes and et cetera on them. So I started cutting clothes first and then you know given my uh, my love of the—the human figure I started cutting shapes in to convey the human form, you know face, hands. And then over time, I started to... play—integrate paper more and more in rendering human—the human body. And—and then it one one summer it just clicked on me, “What if...” because you know at first I was just conveying form by cutting into paper like, you know, cutting paper to convey you know, fingers or the folds of the fabrics et cetera. But there's definitely that sense of flatness on that paper. You know I would be cutting one one block of the single paper cut out,

you know, the eyelid, the mouth, the nose; but you know there's that level of flatness. [laughs] Because it's just one single paper, one color.

Uh then it clicked on me one summer, "What if I start cutting blocks of paper? Layering them on top of each other in such a way that you know, the layers gradually get lighter in tone and value, as you move... as you move closer to... you know as you move— that particular point in the body is closer to the viewer." And that's realized— that's when I realized, "Oh, I can render... I can create the illusion of three-dimensionality through that." It's like the similar concept of, you know, shading et cetera in the areas that are further away or tend to be darker. [laughs] And then as you move closer to the object you know your pressure gets lighter and then you— that... the way... [laughs] that's how basically...

AS: Besides your AP training, did you have any formal training?

AP: Yeah no yeah. My only yeah, art training is exclusively from high school. [**AP** and **ZC** laugh] And four years of it. Actually I wasn't supposed to... uh yeah you know because we get our freshmen year schedule set up, even before we even attend the high school. And then I remember uh... the few weeks before starting high school I got uh... the notion—or I got super interested in art that summer before high school. Because you know both my sisters went through— took art classes in high school, they—yeah took art classes with the same art teacher there and um... uh learning from um Miss Walker, I got inspired by them you know uh portfolios their sketchbooks. And then you know I started drawing the summer before high school. I, my— we had a book a reference book, you know shading, you know, drawing in general.

That—I got interested to the point that on the very first day of high school, I— I went to my counselor's office and then asked if I could switch— drop one of my elective classes and pick up art. And then given that, you know that, you know my counselor told me to reach out to the art teacher, and then found her even before classes started; and then she, you know recognized me because uh I used to attend open houses with my siblings; and one of the stops was the art classroom area and she said, "Oh yeah, of course!" And then she was able to somehow get me to her class that very first day. Ever since then, I've—I've loved with art. Always uh whenever I'm not at the science and math coaches' rooms practicing, I would be in the art classroom after school or before school even started. Or even, also even if I— if I finished my lunch early, I would just hang out... uh that, that room...

ZC: Did you do art before high school or like did high school, like really start your...

AP: Really, yeah high school and the summer before. I was drawing here and there in middle school, but it wasn't a serious endeavor, I would say. I was a— yeah. Only the summer leading up to high school and then high school, I was completely enamoured with art and expressing thoughts and ideas visually. [laughs] And then that captured my— my imagination as a young kid.

AS: Did your like, early childhood experience have any impact on your art styles?

AP: Oh yes I would say um... I remember you know... having very little back then in the Philippines uh... it's a luxury to be able to buy paper. Like colored paper in stores back then. And you know whenever we did buy paper and I would use it and we would use it in school projects, uh you— we

would— I— you know using it—use it sparingly and not have a lot of waste et cetera. Um because it's— you know, it's very precious to buy, you know, allocate money that you could be spending to buy food and to supplies. Uh so I carried that over into my life. Um in terms of being— even though I have the— the wherewithal right now to buy materials, um any amount of materials that I need. But there's always that you know, part of me that doesn't like seeing waste. You know I... the paper that I, that—I keep the scraps of what is left over from the projects that I've worked on, because I— over time I can use that in the future for something else. And in, so in terms of materials that might be an effect of my experience back then. Uh in terms of subject matter or style... um is it from the Philippines, my time in the Philippines, or just childhood in general?

AS: Uh anything you [**AP:** Anything.] would like to talk a little that impacted your styles or your subject matter.

AP: Oh okay, yeah in terms of yeah. So I would consider myself a portraitist. A portrait artist. Um I've always been yeah... I've dabbled, I've drawn landscapes and still lifes and abstract even dabbled in that. But I've been—I've always went back to portrait art, because I'm just—I don't know part of me has always been interested in—in studying people and understanding. Just studying people in general, and trying my best to not only reflect how they look like um superficially on my artwork, but also try to capture something else. Capture their personality, capture stories that they've lived and be able to tell it visually.

And... I've always been drawn to that because I don't know growing up as a kid, you know I—I was young when I left, never really got to know uh my dad et cetera. And, and you know, you know coming into America, lived a very sheltered life... not in a bad way, because uh... kind of most of it's because, you know, I wanted to, [laughs] wanted to focus on my studies and have a better future. Uh better than what I had back then. And yeah so, I've always, yeah I guess, I— I didn't really have a lot of connections growing up to other people outside my immediate family. Outside my siblings and my parents. So now, recently, you know, during high school and— and you know, my life in the past few years making a lot of portraits. I guess subconsciously I do that, because I want to connect with people more. Uh I never really thought about why, why I do portraits mostly. But I would say yeah, because I never really... yeah growing up I've always been secluded. Oh, self-imposed seclusions et cetera. And uh [laughs] so yeah... sorry.

ZC: Yeah no, you're good. Do you like—do you, do you like choose a subject matters or do you like basing it off real people, or is it... I don't know, what is your art process I guess?

AP: Ah I see. Yeah in terms of the people I end up rendering in art, they're people I've met whose stories that I connected with. Like the very first full body portrait in layers of paper that I did back in 2017, I—it's this... uh lady, an immigrant, moving to America and you know a single mom et cetera. And you know I saw in her a little bit of... of my mom. And so I, so in that, yeah, I spent a lot of time in that artwork. There was just a lot of energy that I was able to put into that piece of work. I remember spending the whole summer, or not the whole summer, the whole month of July in 2017, uh after work and during weekends just devoting my time to it. Uh looking back, um, now that I think the reason why I just got into that mental zone of, just focusing on that, is because a little bit is I wanted—I saw a stories that she had

that is very similar to my mom and so I just wanted to [laughs] share that, I wanted to create an artwork to celebrate both of them.

And ever since then, I've always just been rendering portraits of people that I meet in Houston, people that you know have made an impact on me. Uh or just people that I completely respect and whose stories—whose lives are very intriguing and they lived through interesting things. And that you know overall they represent ideals that I think needs to be celebrated. I focus mostly on rendering minorities. Uh I had—don't have a big body of work yet, but that's my artistic mission going forward, render portraits of people whose stories may not necessarily... you know been told, or is told uh, with a lot of attention. I want to make an impact regarding that uh. Just celebrate us. [laughs] Uh celebrate um... yeah, because you know throughout history, and you know art history, there's always that one sort of um... figurative visual that we see over and over in art works. And, you know, I want to contribute to the bigger effort to diversify. Uh what we see in artworks. I'm not... you know, I'm just a small fish in the, the sea but I want to contribute a little bit at that.

AS: That's very noble.

AP: Aw thank you.

AS: And uh, what do you see first in a person, like you were saying (incoherent) in your artistic creation?

AP: Okay, I see. Well it's kind of odd, it's something I can't describe, but you know growing up, you know. I've always been secluded et cetera but... whenever I meet a person like within seconds, I can immediately tell the sort of people that they are. I can pick up if that person's to be trusted or if that person went through a lot in their lives. I don't know how I'm able to do that, but I'm able to just pick up easily on people's overall personality, individuality, and, and their genuineness, et cetera. And so you know I meet a person and able to get that sort of immediate download from them, from how they look, from how they present themselves, from how they move around. And I immediately, it's a split—sometimes a split second decision. And then you know, and then you know after talking a while with them, my decision to render their portraits gets... solidified even more, uh. But yeah uh... sorry I got distracted. So the question about how I commit, what causes me to render...?

AS: Like to read people like what facial feature or what part of their face is...

AP: Oh okay. It's mostly the whole package in terms of their stories to... uh and you know their personality their— how they look— not necessarily how they look, because I'm not really drawn to that, even though visually it's immediately what viewers see is how that person looks. Uh, I get interested in rendering someone's portrait because something beyond you know the superficial layers, their— their whole being in general. Uh if they're a kind person, if they're a person that uh had— went through things in their lives that I was able to connect with, that I empathize with et cetera. That, that's really the reason why I make portraits. Uh the background information that they have uh, and helping you know doing my part in society to recognize that... recognize those features and celebrate it and share it with the world visually.

ZC: How is like, I guess doing art, more regularly, um kind of changed your life, I guess?

AP: Oh okay, so back— after high school, I— I didn't really do art. I stopped doing art for a— many years until 2016, mid-2016, uh, when I started attending the Sunday Sketcher's Group. [laughs] I— it's a, it's a— I actually still go— after this interview actually I might stop by there. Because uh, they're really, made friends with them. But I picked up art again in 2016, because I got very stressed from work [laughs] and someone made the suggestion to me, "What if you, you know uh... ex— you know draw again and you know, let that inner stress that you're harbouring in you flow out?" [laughs] So I started picking up art back then in response to stress. And uh right now I'm, since 2016, I've been making art increasingly more and more uh, and the drive for that is— you know part of it is because I want to render as many portraits as I could, even though it's taking me a long time to do each one. But I don't mind, I mean, I'm not, I'm not looking at the end result in terms of number; but rather, just enjoying the process of making portraits and artworks.

I do it now because to display at a local art gallery that I'm in, uh to enter in various exhibitions around town and across the nation, exhibitions that piqued my interest specifically. Uh, I try to pick and choose because I have very limited time to make artworks and have a day time job, I have to just pick and choose what kind of exhibitions I want to be a part of. Uh and make art works uh... So that's, that and then making artworks now, is enabling me to just have an escape into a world that is quiet and pensive and it just—I don't know, it's just a different world that I'm in whenever I'm making art. Uh I can't describe it. [laughs] And it passes the time. The free time that I do have.

AS: Yeah like when you make art, it— hours pass by [**AP:** Yes.] without really...

AP: Time flew by, yeah, exactly. [laughs]

ZC: I guess how much time does it take normally for you to do a piece?

AP: Oh okay. So that first big portrait piece that I did in July 2017, it's two feet high and about, I think, 18 inch wide. Uh it's a full body portrait, took me the whole month of July— well not the whole month, it was actually three weeks after the first Saturday of that month. The following, the first Sunday, up until end of July after work, you know. And then after work, you know, I would eat dinner and then immediately start working on it for about until 1 am, 2 am in the morning; starting at 9 pm at night, four, five days a week for three weeks and then weekends. Those weekends, I think I dedicated both Saturday and Sunday. I didn't attend... typically I go to tennis uh just to play for fun, not competitively uh with friends; but I didn't attend the tennis meetups during that month at all. I got super, uh, dedicated into really making that artwork, I can't describe—I can't really put it into words what enveloped me in terms of— or what in terms of the inspiration. Well I know kind of the inspiration that move me along through it. But yeah I got a lot of... yeah I was driven to make that. Sorry I got distracted again.

So that hour—that took me about... I stopped counting around—I don't know how to quant— maybe I can't quantify it, maybe over a hundred hours. But ever since then, I have been making portraits at, have less layers or smaller in nature and just uh, you know, the bust, not the full body; even though I've recently— uh I've been making full body portraits too. I've been able to do it faster right now. Uh, I would

say fifty hours per... sometimes much faster than that because uh, I—you know, I would use less layers and smaller in scale. I can't really quantify yeah. The reason why I'm struggling with that is I make art n-n- I don't really keep track. Time just passes by and uh... yeah, it I can't quantify how much time I spend on each one. I can yeah... I make art just to make it and to pass time in general. Mhm.

AS: How did you get associated with the Archway Gallery?

AP: Oh um in that summer actually, um actually that July, the first Saturday of July 2017, I submitted for an, you know for their annual Juried Show. I got one piece accepted uh and it was that Saturday that uh kind of changed the momentum in terms of my art pursuits. Because I got an honorable mention with that small scale self portrait in layers of paper. It was kind of a very minimalist work, uh because I remember that the deadline was earlier that week of July 2nd or July 3rd and I made the artwork the Sunday bef—the Sunday before that one afternoon. It was a very— because I already had one piece that I made, a self-portrait piece that had many layers, and we can submit up to two artworks. And so that afternoon I decided I wanted to create something else, I just I'm not submitting just one. And I quickly made this self-portrait that had three layers. Uh and that was the piece that got selected and I—

So the reception for that show was the first Saturday of July 2017. I was just ecstatic to be part of an exhibition and then I heard my name and they were saying out the honorable mentions and I received a little certificate. And yeah, that completely inspired me, to the point that the following day Sunday—that's when I started the big piece of uh— of uh, that— that friend who's sitting down on a golden throne in a confident manner. [laughs] And yeah ever since then I've always been... S-s-sorry I got... So I got associated with Archway Gallery through that.

The following year also I uh... I submitted for their annual show, I got into that show also um, and you know throughout the whole time I would... If whenever I had time, I would attend their opening receptions, their monthly opening receptions. Typically the first Saturday of each month. Uh and then, I think they, you know, over time... you... I got encouragement from some of the artists to apply and I did. A few months later I heard back that, you know I got accepted. Been a member Archway Gallery since June 2019 last summer.

ZC: How often do you show your art at Archway Gallery or in public, or in other art exhibitions?

AP: I see. So Archway is a co-op artgallery it all... 32 members are owners of the gallery. So we get to... we get allocated a wall per month to show you know whatever artworks we want to show. So uh our artworks continually being shown there every month. Uh the front side of the gallery is a featured artist. Um so one artist gets to show a whole body of work, but uh yeah, so there's always artworks by other members, uh, at the gallery; so you should come by and visit [laughs] whenever you have time and whenever you're in that area.

AS: So how have your um experience in math, architecture, and beyond, get involved in your thought process?

AP: Uh... I guess involved a lot in terms of precision and... um just trying to be more— and also my desire to reflect the people that I'm trying to make an artwork for, to the best of my abilities. Um so then

that side and also um my desire to be as precise as possible uh with how I create my artworks. Uh I think they both feed into... into yeah my practice uh always, yeah I was kind of a math nerd back then; and actually uh one of the things I brought for the— what do you call it, the time capsule? Is that? I'm donating the certificate that I got from winning the national trigonometry championship. So I've always been in— I've always loved math, especially on the side where geometry is involved where there's figurative things are involved.

Uh so... so yeah my love of math and because math is all, you know, math is really all about patterns in nature et cetera. You're trying uh—there are human's— humanity's endeavor to quantify what is out there in nature et cetera. So there's always that connection of art to math uh, that I've been interested in. And, you know, like Leonard Da Vinci, he employed in his pursuit of studying the human body, he conveyed that through the lens of science and math. Um so I guess nah—I'm not doing that in the same degree as him, compared myself to him; but uh— but yeah uh, in terms of you know, I try my best have proportions be as— uh as real as possible. Uh so I guess in my— my— my upbringing of my— my side, my younger side that was completely enamoured with math and science is somehow finding its way... uh, into my art practice. And uh little bit of som—I had one small series of artworks that I, that I created in Excel that created a formula that just changed two variables and I'm able to generate uh different sorts of motifs. Uh, and I can, I should have brought, I think one I printed out, should have brought it. [AS: You can share those later.] Later [laughs] [—: We can include it in your archive.] Okay, okay sounds good.

AS: So have you heard of the AI generated art that was sold in a Christie's auction about one and a half years ago?

AP: AI generated... oh okay. I don't follow... pro- probably sounds really bad but I don't follow art as much as I should be. Uh but, what- what's that about? AI generated art?

AS: Uh it was an [AP: Sold?] algorithm like, also computer generated, actually code generated art, that was on an auction that Christie's sold for over \$400,000.

AP: Oh okay, what was the final product that they sold, was it a visual artwork?

AS: Yeah it's a visual— it's an image of a portrait.

AP: An image of a portrait. [AS: Mhm.] A st— a still portrait?

AS: Yes.

AP: Oh okay.

AS: Yeah I can also share with you.

AP: Oh interesting, yeah I'll research that.

AS: Yeah I guess the... you can share with us your thoughts of... um how computer art [—: Okay.] or... um code art since you also did a little bit about?

AP: Oh yeah, so yeah it's really, it's just PowerPoint and Excel. Because I use those tools very frequently uh, in college and in my life right now, my work life. So I've always—I remember in college I was, um, I was in a supply chain management uh class, graduate program, and one of the assignments one night was finding the—quantifying the cost, uh, minimizing the cost of the different routes to get raw materials to, uh, you know, the manufacturers and then to wholesalers, retailers, et cetera. And you know, making those connections, you know, points and making them, connecting lines between them, uh, interested me. And I was doing it by hand and just drawing the little diagrams. And then I had a—I had time that evening, I was just on campus uh, and I said, oh—because I, you know, even though I- I- I draw neatly, uh I kinda wanted to up my homework in terms of presentation, want to make it look more professional. So I did it in PowerPoint and when- when I was, when I started playing around with the lines, that's when I found out you can change the thickness of the lines, you can change the transparency, you can change the color. And I remember putting a bunch of lines together like one time, and then applying a movement command in uh, in PowerPoint uh, like one of the rotations or flips. Uh the lines started moving, and that captured my attention and I- I made a whole series of PowerPoint art. And they're mostly uh move- because I say movements of a hummingbird, so they are all movements of birds flight patterns, et cetera, uh, through lines. Just straight lines. And because if you amass a bunch of lines together and uh lay them out in a way that, you know, they're con- diverging et cetera, you can convey a- a sense of curves even though you're just using straight lines.

Uh, and then a few years later, down when I started working um, I got- I got super stressed with work, then I just started playing around in Excel. [laughs] And I- and I- because I originally I- I had this formula and then I plotted ten thousand points, and then you co- uh, converted, you know, radial points to x, y coordinate points and then use the, you know, highlighted those ten thousand points, coordinates and then used the- the graph feature in Excel and just created interesting designs, spirals that- that uh drove me into a different path in terms of completely engage myself for a few nights. [laughs] Just me generating a bunch of these motifs in true Excel. Um... uh, yeah, I don't have a lot—I don't have training in terms of computer art, only limited to Excel, PowerPoint, and Microsoft Powe- paint. [chuckles] Uh, but in the future maybe.

I do have a good friend who used to live in Houston, who- who did, uh AI art. Yeah. So I'm- so I've heard of the AI art, but I've never heard of the Christie's auction piece. But yeah, he uh- a friend of mine, I got interested in when he showed some kind of neutral art? I don't know what the specific term for that. neutral uh... algorithms uh I felt. [chuckles] I never pursued it. Yeah. Uh, in the future maybe, I would want to infuse art- uh technology in my art. I don't know how. Because I want to be able to go from paper to maybe glass or plexi, colored plexi. Because I want to play with translucency and it's hard to do that with [laughs] with paper. Uh, and I don't want to go back to painting, uh, because I just- I don't know- I don't want simpler workspace and dry work space. [laughs] But you know, you can do translucency with painting, but with paper it's not as much. But in the future I would like to be able to make portraits. I don't know, layers of glass or plexiglass. I think that would be- and have that- have interplay with light in the room, wherever that is, maybe site specific kind of art. [laughs] Yeah.

AS: So how did you become involved with the Visual Arts Alliance?

AP: Okay, uh- so yeah, in late twenty... yeah, late 2016, you know, because mid-2016 was when I started getting into art and then I started branching out in terms of finding opportunities to show my work and I, I found out through research of Visual Arts Alliance, uh. That fall, they had an open call for art. Uh, an open exhibition- well it was a membership exhibition, so I became a member and then I was able to apply for it. I got into that art show, um it was curated by a local gallerist in town. Uh it was- yeah. It was juried and curated by a local gallerist in town. Um, and so I got- that was my first exposure with VAA.

Um, I think right before that I had attended one of their other offerings which is Third Monday Critique Night. Basically, uh, an art critique, uh anyone in the public can just bring their artwork and can have it peer critiqued by the people in attendance. Uh, so it's an interesting idea. So I started getting involved slowly with VAA by attending the monthly critique nights, um meeting people through that event, and then getting into that exhibition, and then attending other, uh programs that the VAA produces which the others are educational programs. Um, and then, you know, I got involved, I met a lot of people, and then by spring the following year in 2017, the president asked me if I would be willing to, um, if I would be willing to increase my volunteerism with the—instead of just volunteering, I, you know, put up shows, et cetera; volunteer as a board member, and as a treasurer, and I figured, why not?

Because growing up I always— now that I'm getting, you know, I'm grow- getting older, et cetera, part of my mission in life is to give back to society, to community. Especially given, oh I'm that- I'm really driven to that because of the fact that I got a lot of help, [chuckles] um growing up, um, in terms of being able to come to the US in the first place, um; the scholarships I was able to get to put me through college, et cetera; the different mentors that I've had in my life who, you know, even though I may not know it. But, you know, we have—we always have mentors out there who support us and put good words out there, even though we are not aware of it. And I'm just- even though I am not aware of it, I'm just appreciative of everything that's coming into my life, that's helping me progress. And I- I wanna give back. I haven't really completely in- in capacity of, thought about how and in what ways I could give back to the community; but when I got that, you know, opportunity to serve on the board and of this local nonprofit arts organization as their treasurer, I figured that could be one way for me to begin my journey of giving back. Because I'm reaching that point in my life where, you know, there's younger generations out there that need support, [chuckles] et cetera. And I felt driven by VAA because of the fact that it's all volunteer based. Uh, it's, you know- we're not- we're not- we're not paid to, to be doing the work that we are doing. Everything is volunteer, uh, time and efforts and I found that to be very, I don't know, I find that super interesting, because you know, we're doing things for the community not because we're getting anything in return; but rather, we're doing it because really—we're really driven to make an impact in our community even though the community may just be a small one, you know the local art community; but it's still something that, you know, we feel driven by and I find that super inspiring by the different board members, the different volunteers who are making things happen in that organization. And I'm doing my small part in terms of keeping the books. [laughs] Because given my accounting background, yeah. Also one of the reasons why they ask me if I would like to step up as the treasurer.

AS: Do you get involved in the local Filipino community?

AP: Oh I do. Uh, so actually one of the uh, the people that you interviewed at HAAA um, that might be one too many A's, [All Laugh] HAAA.

AS: 3 A's, yeah. [laughs]

AP: Because there is a HAA, which is the Houston Arts Alliance, a government entity. A different- okay, uh... Yeah, so Matt- Matt Manalo, so he along with Ms. Bray at the Asia Society, um, had got a- basically a group started, and it's all Filipino artists in Houston—not just visual artists, but uh, variety of uh artistic pursuits. Uh, so that got started this past summer in June 2019 and ever since then, you know, we've been, uh, a collective of artists, you know, wanting with a pursuit, with an idea of getting our voice out there in the local Houston community, uh, out more. And you know, we've been putting exhibitions—oh a lot, really a lot of exhibitions; but finding whatever opportunities came, you know, we would, uh participate in them like um, there was this annual showcase, uh held at one of the- the galleries in town, uh studio buildings in town, I mean. Uh, Houston based artists, so we got to show there. Uh, we had a movie night actually, at Rice University last summer. Uh, I forget the name of the building, uh, the Rice Media Center, that's it. Uh, and we had a little reception and then, you know, some of the visual artists displayed their artworks. So, you know, we're slowly um, you know, getting out there, [chuckles] showing our work more and more to the public and if anything, the purpose of the collective, in my opinion, is to make, you know, Houston in general aware that, you know, that there's a community of Filipino artists here [chuckles] wanting to have a voice also. And...

ZC: What's the name of this collective?

AP: Ah, it's called uh, "Filipinx Artists of Houston".

ZC: Okay.

AP: Uh sorry, do you have a piece of tissue?

AS: Oh yeah. Go for it. Yes.

AP: Sorry. Probably should've brought some. No this works. Thank you. [blows nose] I'm sorry.

AS: No no no, take your time.

AP: And I apologize if I like uh, go off on tangents and... [laughs]

All: No it's fine, we like that.

AP: And if I talk too much, please let me know so. [chuckles]

AS: We actually don't really edit anything.

AP: Oh okay, I see.

AS: I mean, we cut out the breaks, but... Yeah so...

AP: And if I- if some of the things I've told earlier, or if you want more details, I can- we can go back to that, if you want.

AS: Can you talk a little about- a bit about the "Drawing from the Sound"?

AP: Drawing from the...?

AS: The Sound?

ZC: ...the Wound. (**AS:** The Wound.) Wound.

AP: Oh "Drawing from the Wound". Oh ok.

So that's-um-that art collective there's just seven members in it. We actually just had a meeting yesterday 1-4pm. [Chuckles] One of the reasons why yesterday was just kind of a hectic day.

Um.. so it was formed around September last year. I wasn't there for the first meeting. I got invited like few weeks afterwards. Um.. and so it's seven local Houston artists. Uh and... it was founded—it was spearheaded, it's being spearheaded by this local artist. Uh, I guess I can share her name: Laura Spector.¹ Uh, and she formed this group this art collective with the idea of artists exploring visually and through narrative—the ideas of grief, apology and healing. So that's okay, so a little bit of background—so originally, you know mo...the goal is to share the works in the future; but..uh...the process, it was very methodical in her part to guide us along. Um we, uh she, you know, she gave the—the—the idea that we would pursue grief, apology, and healing in our works of art. And at first, we had to write flash fiction, uh, on each topic uh, that is, you know, autobiographical in nature in a way, you know, drawing from what it- what we've experienced in life, related to grief, apology and healing. [chuckles] Uh, and you know, write it down in a flash fiction format, you know, a few hundred words to about seven hundred words. Um, and then now, we finished that part of the collective last month, you know, writing, and then now we're starting to create three pieces of work related to each one of those topics. Uh, and so, you know, slowly, you know, we're still building, you know, we're—you know—we're still kind of a young collective, we're just now making the artworks, and then slowly applying for exhibitions around town, around the state. One is coming up in 2022. [chuckles] I think I can share that, hopefully, a few- couple years from now. But, and then but- before that, we hope to also show as a collective, as a group, uh, locally, uh this year, or later this year, or in 2021.

And yeah so that kind of collective uh forced each one of us to draw from things that we have experienced in life and it's been a, uh, a kinda fun- I don't know, therapeutic- well, in some parts, you know, had to relive trauma, but in a way, it was kind of helpful? It was kinda—it was kinda healthy to not harbor things that we went through any longer and just put it out there, and type it up into a rough writing. I remember, not flash fiction— flash nonfiction, sorry, misspoke. And then now, you know, creating the visual to go along with those works of nonfiction that are autobiographical in nature and [chuckles] I think it will be an experience uh, making the artworks. I haven't made a lot of progress in that because I have to be in a certain mindset. Because you know, creating the artworks also, it's hard to not relive

¹ <https://www.commonfield.org/network/3410/laura-spector>

things [chuckles] while making the artworks also. But I think I'm ready and um, we're kind of low key collective right now. We're not putting ourselves out there because you know, we haven't really created artworks yet; but you know, we- slowly we'll, we'll find traction.

And so yeah, I'm just part of two art collectives right now. The "Filipinx Artists of Houston" group, uh I'm enjoying being part of that group because it's— growing up in America, ever since I left in 2000, I never went back and I live kind of a secluded life where I'm just, was just confined uh, in myself essentially and my small family. And just going along, going through my studies and going to college and working, um, growing up I- I- I- I kinda got, you know, seperated in a way from the culture that I grew up in back then. And this collective is enabling me to uh, to connect, to find my roots, uh, recenter myself again, uh, with a lens from the perspective of a Phillipino person immigrating, coming to America trying to succeed here, trying to just live a life where, you know, I'm able to do things that I enjoy in a way, that I'm not having to worry too much about other parts of life. I mean, not having to worry about putting food in the table, et cetera. Uh, living a, a comfortable life, pursuing things that I like, which is art and giving back to community.

I guess, going back to community, uh, you know, I volunteer at VAA, et cetera, through work I- I volunteered at, you know, handing food at the Ronald McDonald House, um; and then little bit at the Hobby Center, being a volunteer usher. But uh, some day, hopefully I can find- I wanna- because I really want to find a cause in town that's arts related, um, that I can really, that have a mission, that I really believe in. Someday, yeah, I'll find more groups like that and some day, you know, when, uh you know my work life, when I get to a point in my work career that will enable me to have more time. I think, I will- I will be completely filling that extra time with giving back to society.

ZC: How much time do you spend at work normally?

AP: Normally? Okay. Uh, right now I'm in a firm that I'm completely enjoying and it has a better work life, better atmosphere that encourages work-life balance [chuckles] and, you know, I'm just coming to work at 9:00, 8:30 to 9:00, sometimes between 8:30 and 9:30. And then leaving work um, around 6:00, 6:30, sometimes you know, around 5:30, you know, very flexible. Um, so yeah. Normal business, you know, kind of 8 hours per day kind of work style. Uh, and then after that, you know, I get to do things around town: attend exhibitions, openings, or hang out with friends, meet up for coffee, uh, go to art collective meetings, et cetera, buy art supplies, spend time in my art studio [chuckles] to make art. That's pretty much it.

ZC: Oh, so you have your own art studio?

AP: I do, I'm renting a space at the Sawyer Yards Art Complex. Um, I've had this studio since April 2018. And actually yeah, two weeks ago I decided to not pursue having a lease there. Not, you know, not, you know, not- not because I- I don't want to be there anymore; but rather because uh, I want to have more efficiency in my life; because you know, the past two years I would have to drive over there to make art. My art supplies are over there. Then go home, uh to sleep and work, et cetera and the time that I lose by driving back and forth, and [chuckles] start to think it's better to have all my art supplies, art, tools, and et cetera uh where I live, [laughs] so I can— because I kinda miss that before I got an art studio. Uh, you know, I would make art until 2 am in the morning, and then, you know, just within minutes or within

seconds I would be in my bed, sleeping and waking up around 7 am to go to work. So it was so much easier— it's so much easier to have your— your art where you live. [chuckles]

And I— I kinda want to also, and it also kinda ties me down to that location and I like being everywhere. I like moving. I don't like being tied down too much, uh, mentally and I want to pursue other creative, uh, other creative outlets, uh in addition to visual art in the future. So I think I'm taking, I'm taking the steps right now to relieve myself of things that are grounding me too much, and so I can start moving about into other pursuits creatively. But I'll do, I'll still be making art regardless of me whether or not I have an official art studio somewhere else of where I live or not.

AS: How do you think art has changed the Houston landscape and how has it evolved?

AP: Okay, um, so I've lived in Houston since August 2014 and so my, my view of art in Houston is very limited. But I have, you know, through, you know, everyone that I've met in the art community, who've lived in Houston and who've, for decades, who've seen the change; uh, from their eyes I'm able to kinda get a sense that it has gone through uh, significant changes. I can't go into specifics because I don't— they're not my, my recollections and I—I don't want— I wanna give justice to them and I don't want to misspeak. But overall in general, I think the Houston Arts Community is experiencing a growth in an exponential way. Uh, I think yeah. And more—you know, being the third largest city in terms of population, uh it's getting up there in terms of its arts. I think Houston has the largest, if not the second or first—the largest or the second largest, um working arts community in the nation if, if my memory serves me right. And so that, that, that data point kinda speaks to uh, where art is going in Houston relative to other parts of the country.

ZC: How do you think artists of min- minority backgrounds are received compared to, like compared to like other artists, like minority background artists in Houston?

AP: Ah okay. I see, okay. Um tough question. [**ZC & AP:** laughs] Uh, okay. Um, you know um... yeah so I think we live in a city that, thankfully, is very well integrated in terms of the different- you know, people from all over the world, from different walks of life uh, come mingling in a city where everyone is just are aware of each other, and I think that contributes to an environment in which everyone is just innately more accepting of others. So in terms of local art to which I'm involved in that I, that I can immediately see, I see, you know, I see art being pursued and being appreciated, uh, by artists who represent the whole city, in my opinion.

Uh, but in terms of, you know, the, the gallery scene, the galleries, you know, um, you know in terms of the artists they represent, I don't follow the gallery scene as much as I should be. Maybe in the future I will be once I have more— I have a little bit more time; uh but, I think there's definitely room for improvement in terms of having- of, of galleries around town. Having a roster of artists that fully represent the diversity that we have here in this city because [chuckles] art is being pursued by everybody and sadly, you know, it's a smaller population, smaller population that is being seen at the higher levels of art, which is the gallery scene, I think. Yeah, there's definitely room for improvement.

AS: So how do you think being called a minority artist, um advantaged you or disadvantaged you in any way?

AP: Mhm okay. Um, so what's beautiful about, um, some many of the exhibitions around town in juried exhibitions is they're blind juried. Those are the things that— exhibitions that I've applied for. Uh because, you know the jurors just select artworks based solely on the merit of what they see, the art works, the final product, irrespective of who the artist was or is. Um... so... so... sorry... [chuckles]

AS: Do you think it's a fair process?

AP: Yeah generally, yeah. Very fair process, especially in um, coming from Visual Arts Alliance, it's a nonprofit, uh, it's a nonprofit art— mainly art educational arts organization that provides arts educational programs; but a, a different portion of the nonprofits offerings is exhibitions opportunities and uh, the exhibition opportunities um, the exhibitions are juried by people of, you know, of notoriety, of fame, uh, people who are known in the art community. Ah sorry. And we only present them images of artworks and very basic information. All the personal- personally identifi- identifiable information are stripped out, it's just the title of the art work, the medium, the size, the year it was completed, and then the art or image. So I- it's a very fair process and a lot of organizations— art organizations that hold exhibitions follow that sort of, uh formula, you know, blind juried process. So in terms of the exhibition world, uh I think it's a very fair, uh process. Uh people from all walks of life all, all backgrounds are able to uh get those opportunities, fairly and based solely on their merits. Uh what they make. Um, so yeah, other parts of the art community in terms of gallery, the museum worlds, that's a different story that I don't have a lot of information to base my- my opinions on, even though I do have opinions, I don't have enough research or data to support, [chuckles] to fully support my "what I would say" if I were to comment on those things.

AS: So what do you think they could've done better if any- if anything? In the museum world.

AP: Uh, yeah, I would say because in the museum world, you know, once you start looking into them and dissecting, uh, the people in management, people in the curatorial departments and start looking, gathering data points about the decision makers in those institutions, you will see a, you know, a pattern in which it may not be as equitable from visually from a in— from a third-person perspective, so I think, uh you know, they could have more diversity also in those positions. Decision making positions in museum world and the gallery world, et cetera. Uh yeah, I think that's the case. More diversity at the top will trickle down and enable for a variety of voices to be heard instead of just singular or few voices being heard during those steering committee meetings that they have. Yeah.

ZC: So besides, I guess, art and work, what else do you— how else do you spend your time?

AP: Um, [chuckles] uh so I play tennis, I- I try to play tennis, you know, for five— not a, not a professional level or a serious level, just I play as some form of exercise and a some for of, um, to socialize with friends; [chuckles] uh during Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons, and if I have time after work Mondays, Wednesdays, and Friday nights. But that's very infrequent, but when— just whenever there's time. Uh, other than that, uh yeah, work takes up a lot of my time and art afterwards takes up most of the rest of the time, and then the different parts of being a, you know, just living through life takes up the rest, like doing chores, buying groceries, and then also whenever exhibition opportunities, you know, art events happen around town that peak my interest or that—or, you know, events in which my friends are involved in; then you know, I would drop everything that I've been doing

and attend those. Uh, but I really really believe in community building and I have, you know, a lot to do in terms of um, making myself be— you know to contribute more into the community, but slowly and the little time I do have I try to support others, yeah.

ZC: And does your family live in Texas or Houston or...

AP: Oh, yeah, um, my— I have a sister and her family uh, lives in Katy. Uh, I have another sister and her family lives, uh, they live in San Antonio. And I have a brother and his family, uh they live in Corpus Christi where we originally, uh, immigrated to when we came from the Philippines. Uh, my mom used to live in Corpus Christi up until 2017, uh, but early 2017 she moved back to the Philippines, permanently too. Because it's just much cheaper to live there. [laughs] And uh, I have one grandparent still, you know, thankfully still with us and, you know, and my mom wanted to be with her, spend time with her. Since, you know, they've been separated for periods of time in their lives also. And, you know, and then, you know, I have relatives in there in the Philippines also.

AS: Do you still keep in touch with the relatives and your grandparents too?

AP: Mmm, yeah. I would call my mom, yeah, frequently. And whenever— whenever my grandparent is with my mom, you know, I would be able to talk to her. Um, but in terms of my other relatives, I don't really, [chuckles] you know, interact with as much.

ZC: Mmm, what part of the Philippines, um, are your— is your family from, and did they still live in the same place?

AP: Yeah, near- we're in the Rizal, I guess it's a state, comparable to a state, and then San Mateo, Rizal is where I'm from. The city San Mateo— San Mateo City in Rizal. And Rizal is near the Metro Manila Complex. So near the Manila area. Um, they still live there, my relatives. Uh, and my mom, uh, lives in that area, Rizal I think, I don't know the city, I forgot the geography. But near Manila, that area. Uh my grandmother, uh who's still with— she lives in the Northern part of the Philippines, in Pangasinan, Bolinao, Philippines. Bolinao is the city and Pangasinan is the state. Um, and yeah, but— but my grandmother would be traveling to the Metro Manila area uh frequently to visit her children there, including my mom. [chuckles]

AS: Have you thought about helping people with trauma or traumatic experiences to improve their condition through art therapy, with what you're doing with “Drawing from the Wound”?

AP: Um, that's a good idea. I think, yes, maybe, that's a good— yes thank you for suggesting that. Yeah I think once I go through this “Drawing from the Wound” art collective experience and then also I- I- I think that the totality of what I'm experiencing right now including— inclusive also of the “Filipinx Artists of Houston” art collective, of which I'm drawing back to where I came from and delving into topics [chuckles] that is relevant to being a citizen of the the Philippines, living through hardships et cetera. I think that's a totality of everything that I will be experiencing that I— I am experiencing and will continue to, will hopefully give me enough, um, enough ability to share, or en- enough information for me to efficiently and to effectively create something. Maybe or contribute to creating something that will enable people who've experienced, uh hardships, et cetera. And overcome them by being part of a community

and— and also maybe, also pursuing art as some form of therapy. [chuckles] Uh, maybe, yeah, that's a good idea. Someday, once my life kind of plateaus a little bit, I'll be able to maybe hopefully dedicate a lot of my time to maybe found or co-found or just volunteer in that sort of, uh, pursuit. [AS: Sounds great.] Because that's a great idea. I would definitely, if there was one right now that I was aware of, I would be a volunteer of it. I would, I would join that.

ZC: What are your plans for the next five to ten years?

AP: Uh, so I'm— my plan? Definitely in terms of my work career, I wanted to reach a level in which I'm able to just not— yeah, just reach a level at work where I'm able to work less, [chuckles] and be able to then allocate those extra time to other pursuits. Um, whether it be pursuing my own art or giving back to community. Um, definitely I won't, I don't foresee myself intensely pursuing a serious— not career, a serious pursuit in art. When I say that serious, as in dedicate a lot of time into it. I will still be making art, I will still be, um, putting art out there that I think is relevant, that is speaks— art that speaks and art that just has um, I don't know, art in general makes an impact in, in my world or in my local community, hopefully.

Um, but oh— because I do want to spread my time in the future not just pursuing my art, but also in community, uh, maybe I, in the next five or ten years I can see myself being a volunteer of other organizations that I feel driven by those missions that I, you know, aligns with my general mission in life. Um, yeah, that's pretty much it.

But you know, growing older I'm starting to realize and you know, the past few years, it's been kind of a hectic experience juggling so many things, but you know, in the future I do want to just volunteer only in select few, not volunteer everywhere— that would just spread me super thinly— uh, but yeah, organizations that and... I would be volunteering in kind of a not necessarily in a supervisory management type role, but rather just volunteering, like being the hands and feet of the organization because that's what I do enjoy. Even though I enjoy, it's okay, you know, doing the, the books and records for the nonprofit that I'm volunteering for, I do enjoy volunteer work more if it involves actually doing things, you know, um, you know, like in the Hobby Center being the usher or um, you know, putting up signs being— going being working the desk and taking attendance or registration or helping set up some kind of program, that sort of volunteer basis that I would enjoy more. [chuckles] Just doing things, physically.

AS: Do you prefer people facing roles or non-people facing roles?

AP: Oh yes, definitely people facing roles. [chuckles] Uh even though I am a very introverted person, it's kind of um, contradictory, but I do enjoy the presence of people, if it makes sense uh. I do have, you know, I need to have my own time to just recharge and be away from the world for periods of time; but whenever I have- whenever there's opportunities to, to be out there, to be interacting with others, I completely enjoy that. I completely, some actually my friends tell me, uh they don't think that I'm an introverted person at all, because whenever I'm with people I'm just, you know, kind of an outgoing sort of— type of person. But uh, I really, I think I attribute that to my uh, just overall interest in learning about people and the more I get exposed to more people, the more data points I'm able to, to remember and to pick up, et cetera; and to, you know, retain and that I think that enables me to just go through life, uh in a much more effective way; because I'm able to just pick up on— pick up on people pretty, pretty easily in

an innate way. I'm not sure how, how it is, but uh, but yeah, I do enjoy yeah, people facing activities because I'm able to learn people, I'm able to talk to them, I'm able to learn where they came from in the world. That's one of the things I enjoy, uh, uh learning whenever I meet new people, where they came from. Mostly they're out of— from out of city, come from another part of the world altogether. Learning more about what milestones in their lives cause them to be here where they are today, just super interesting to me. Because I, a little bit of it is because part of, you know, I went, I'm, you know, because I really want to try to understand little bit about myself more and some of the best ways for us to learn about ourselves is to learn about others, because having those external, uh data provides us with a contrast with, uh a perspective to see ourselves from a different kind of way. And yeah that's... [chuckles] And if you... sorry...

AS: Do you have any spirituality you follow in your life?

AP: Um, Philippines, uh you know, it's a uh predominantly Catholic uh state, country. Uh, so I grew up as a Catholic. Um, I don't necessarily I- I'm very- I'm not religious per se; but I would, I would say that I'm- I can be spritual at times. But never religious. Uh, um, mmm I'm not saying that to discount others who may be pursuing, who are devout members of their religion, I'm not trying to say that. And I— hopefully I'm not offending anyone by saying that, but just in my own experiences in life, um, to go through hardships, to go through poverty and to go through not having food sometimes on the table; you do wonder, you do... it's hard to not wonder and ask where is this being, if there is such a being, that is supposed to be a savior? And then you know, going through education in, in school, open my mind uh widely. Uh I became um, um, devout follower of facts and... [chuckles] and, and information that is palpable, information that is um, backed up by research and testing, et cetera. Um, so yeah, I would say I'm more n- not very religious persay, but I respect religion. I mean, whenever there's um, you know, with family, big occasions, big holiday events like Christmas Eve, I would go to church [chuckles] with them because religion is great in terms of providing a community for people to just be together and— and that, because you know, community develops around a kernel of similarity and that similarity happens to that religion for, for community. Religion, religious related community. Um and I respect that.

And yeah, I'm spiritual in a way because there's— you know there's a lot of unexplained things in, in life and et cetera and I won't discount any of that. But I think I'm just spiritual with regards to how I make connections in the world, the information that I've gathered in life. And, yeah sorry, [chuckles] very brief. Not a very concrete answer. But uh, hopefully that's okay.

ZC: No, that's okay.

AP: Okay.

ZC: We've covered... we've been doing this almost two hours.

AP: Oh, oh I'm sorry! [laughs] And I have the documents here. Do I just give it to y'all?

(incoherent)

AP: Some of these, you know, I didn't even make copies but I don't know...

AS: Oh, we can make copies and give it back to you.

AP: Oh okay, yeah, I can keep the copies. So some of them are, oh yeah, I have plenty of these so I can. I don't need copies of that, but these certificates from the governor of Texas or from the— the— the House of Representatives in Washington D.C., President Bush [chuckles] et cetera, [**AS:** Oh wow!] and things like that. So yeah, maybe just the certificate because if I could get copies for my records. I was— I was scrambling this morning actually trying to find these. I would've made copies myself, but I ran out of time. Sorry about that. And then I have copies of this booklet, so I don't need copies of them. And yeah, that's pretty much it. If you want more artifacts, I can try to find more. Um, but I only picked and choosed the very— I mean the best ones that I could think of, the ones in which was the peak of, I don't know, the respective levels, uh, like various achievements here and there, that I didn't bring along because they were minor in nature.

ZC: Do you have any, kind of final thoughts?

AP: Uh, uh well, what you guys are doing is pretty amazing, And I have to say and thank you for considering me, because, you know, we live in a big city of such diversity over a million people, I don't even know the number. And to be able to provide you my voice, uh to share my story, it's— it's really humbling. Uh, because yeah there's— it's a lot of people, I'm sure there's a lot of people out there who've gone through things that I've gone through. Things that not only I went through, but my family went through. Uh, and to share that story is, it's kind of therapeutic in a way. [chuckles] Uh putting it out there because these things I'm— most of my life, I didn't really tell and share, um, yeah like this is one of the reasons why I never want to go back to the Philippines, because in my mind growing up I escaped it once and I don't want to go back. But uh, but you know, I'm— I'm older now, and um I have my mom and my grandparents there and some relatives that you know I want to see and things that have happened in the past make amends to them, move on; I think that would be helpful, that would be healthy. Um, because, you know, growing up, I mean, I'm in a position in life right now where, you know, I'm not struggling [chuckles] and it's just better if I just move on. We just move on, uh, collectively. Um, and you know, there's a lot of stories out there and thank you for hearing and for... I don't know how you guys found me, but uh, uh but thank you for wanting to hear what I have to say [chuckles] and— and including my story in your overall archive. And thank you.

AS: And thank you.

ZC: Thank you.

AP: And good luck with your studies in the future and good luck with uh, being in whatever amazing, um, organization you're in right now. And good luck with your future studies wherever life uh, takes you.

[Interview Ends.]