

Map23 Lordy Rodriguez April 6, 2023 Transcript

Interview with Lordy Rodriguez, conducted as part of the Mosaic Atlas project. Lordy notes he is culturally Texan, or American but identifies as Filipina. Topics discussed include cartography, poster production, the more philosophical and political nature of cartography, using the Philippines as an example, minimalism, and her inspirations and alumni connections through Stanford. He also discusses art galleries in Benecia and his work with the Institute for Contemporary Art. As part of the Mosaic Atlas project, SJSU students and faculty from the Anthropology and Geography Departments interviewed people who support and produce art throughout the Bay Area.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

artists, art, culture, part, Filipino, growing, map, Texas, community, identity, influence, work, other cultures, Filipino culture, cartography, Benecia,

SPEAKERS

Nina Garcia, Lordy Rodriguez

Nina Garcia 00:02

There we go. So, if you don't mind, I'd like to just first start with establishing who you are. So, can I get your full name?

Lordy Rodriguez 00:13

Sure. My name is Lordy Rodriguez.

Nina Garcia 00:15

Okay, and what cultures do you identify with or just culture singular?

Lordy Rodriguez 00:21

That is a wonderfully phrased. I am culturally Texan, and American, but identify with being Filipino.

Nina Garcia 00:33

And so, for your art, I know you do cartography, is there anything in addition to that?

Lordy Rodriguez 00:46

I would say cartography is as a subject Yes. It's such a wonderfully complicated question. Because cartography is really just a container, I would say that I incorporate a lot of other things into, like, I explore a lot of abstract expressionist ideas and movements and marks, marks similar to minimalism, and a lot of other ideas associated with surrealism and Daoism. Cartography is really just the container that uses a lot or encapsulates a lot or uses a lot of those ideas. Subject or content wise, I would say, I would go as far ranging, there is no limit to the content that I can use. If that makes sense.

Nina Garcia 01:58

No, no, it's, it makes perfect sense. I do like your phrasing of it as a vessel, just like as a driving component to some degree, rather than it being the full aspect.

Lordy Rodriguez 02:12

Exactly. And I from the beginning, when I started working with this body of work in the mid-90s, I was looking at a lot of artists that was looking Oh, that was using maps and cartography and their work. And there were usually two camps of artists that I found that use maps, but very differently. So, an artist like Jasper Johns that uses the image of a map, he did a whole series of maps of the United States that were heavily painted in his in caustic style. And that was one side of the spectrum where artists were using the image of maps, and the kind of connotations that can come up with it, either politically, either socially, or just the shape of it. In Jasper John's case, it was really with the shape. Or at least that was that, that that's the way it was for me. Whereas you saw other artists on the other side of the spectrum that were taking cues from cartography and mapping, and abstracting that shape until it became very, very non utilitarian as a map, but still map like, and this would include artists like Mark Bradford, or yeah, let's say Mark Bradford would be a very good example of one right now or Rick Lowe. [MTM: https://art21.org/artist/mark-bradford/?gclid=CjwKCAjw-IWkBhBTEiwA2exyO1hdJcYM43mBGBIPk05PbwVKv63RTNnUen9ySO0jOvVyCb4IH9dBRBoC4JUQAvD_BwE and <https://www.ricklowe.com/>) And this is the best way when I was working with this for me to navigate the conceptual side of cartography was to play more on the latter side of the spectrum where I was playing with the playing a lot with the map like qualities of cartography, and that notion in your head that says it that reminds me of that, or this looks like that. I was able to take advantage of that. And still use it use a lot of the same kind of reactions one would get from an artists like Jasper John that incorporates mostly the image of the map rather than the language of the map. And then yeah, and then that's where a lot of the work began.

Nina Garcia 04:31

I've been looking at a few of your pieces on your site, and I've noticed a lot of them have been linked to movements or cultural aspects, just social intermingling. So would you say that is a form of motivation for your work? Or would you you expand on that please?

Lordy Rodriguez 04:54

So I think the the base question is what's the motivation?

Nina Garcia 04:58 Yes.

Lordy Rodriguez 04:59

And as an artist, one of the first motivations, the most primal motivation would be more of the aesthetic. What are some of the colors and lines and shapes that are interacting with each other? Why am I attracted to one set of combinations as opposed to others? Or why am I not attracted to things that combinations of shapes and lines that maybe don't work for me visually, whereas for someone else, it might totally work for them. So, it's a purely primal selfish, you know, not selfish, but singular point of view, motivation for the work from there, then that's when I can start to incorporate maybe more of the social or political aspects that are inherent in all maps. This is something that you can't avoid with maps maps have been used for conquering maps have been used for oppression maps have been used for I think better, Benedict Anderson had this really great chapter in his book,

The Imagined Communities [MTM: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benedict_Anderson] where he, you know, looked at the three totems of what creates, I guess, a society, and that would be the museum, the map in the sense census map and the museum. And the map is a central part of that. And so, it's inherent in the usage of mapping. The fun part, I guess a secondary motivation would be defined ways to use my aesthetic in, in service to an idea or a concept, or even a message. One of my favorite artists Rashid Johnson, who's a African American painter uses a lot of the same visual languages that you find in other abstract expressionist artists, especially a lot of abstract expressionist artists from the mid-20th century that were white men. [MTM: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashid_Johnson] And so I remember him saying once that the sheer act of an African American artists painting in an abstract expressionists' way is already a very political act, it is already goes beyond what kind of expectations are placed upon an African American artist. And I thought that was already that was quite beautiful. The sheer act of painting scribbles. Right, is political. Since I was already working within a milieu that was already very inherently political, I would take upon that, that kind of nugget lesson, negative information from Rashid Johnson and incorporate that into my work, and embrace the political socialists in social side while still at the same trying time trying to advance the aesthetic that I'm dealing with. So, I would say that would be the second motivation in my work, because that usually leads the more I experiment with the combination of the two, that first and second motivation that usually leads me to more ideas and more ideas. And that's maybe the third driving motivation is to see how far I can push both sides, both motivations in my work, and see what comes out of it.

Nina Garcia 08:51

What role would you say you take on when you promote your work your art? Would you say you're solely an artist? Or would you consider yourself beyond that? It's an educator, and someone that takes part in organizing art forms.

Lordy Rodriguez 09:13

I think a lot of my work, you could see like there's a lot of maps of the United States, a lot of maps of different states. Within our country. There are world maps and then maps of other places like Europe, and Asia and Africa. So being what I said earlier in the previous question, especially in terms of the political and social side, I would say I would have been probably a citizen first. Especially it feels like the need to be a contributing factor. citizen, especially in terms of voting seems to be more important within the past few years, especially in the face of a lot of countries falling to more fascist rules and fascist rule, which includes Philippines, which Philippines is still a democracy. But you know, we all can see what's happening there along with other countries. So, the need to be a contributing citizen is more important. In this moment in time. I'm always an artist, but being an artist services, other parts of my life more than the other way around arts and nurturing part of my life, it's, it's definitely a huge part of my identity. But just like with all of us, our identities are not monolithic. They are comprised of multiple different identities. And I think it'd be a disservice to those other identities, if one became the most dominant one, we must embrace all of those different parts of ourselves. So being an artist is just one of them. There are others that I would never replace, for being an artist like being a dad, I don't think I could replace that for being an artist. So, I have to share the two.

Nina Garcia 11:21

I do like the statement that people are not monolithic. And it's a good segue into the next question of how does your culture? Or how does your art correlate with your cultural identity? Because you express the role of politics. And you also introduced an intermingling of you with other artists and what you take from them. And I think those all correspond with culture and unique ways. So how would you say that corresponds to your identity?

Lordy Rodriguez 11:57

Right. Can you repeat, repeat the first part of the question?

Nina Garcia 12:12

Yeah. So how does your art form express your cultural identity?

12:19

I don't think it does. On the surface. If again, if we're talking about Filipino culture, or if we're talking about Texas culture, if we kind of take some of the stereotypical visual cues from both cultures, I don't think you would find very much of that in my work. But the essence of what makes me a Texan or what makes me Filipino, are embedded in the word you can't escape it. But I would say I would take a more nuanced view on that. I didn't grow up in the Philippines. Right. So, I missed out a lot on that. On that part of my culture, growing up, and that's been replaced by growing up in Texas. But I grew up in a Filipino household. And like most like all immigrant families know when you're living in these two worlds, growing up in this kind of environment, you have your parents and your family that are providing the only the main link unless you live in a place that are like if I had grown up here in California, I think I would have been a much more I would have been much more exposed to the Filipino culture and had more of it, surrounding my everyday existence, as opposed to growing up in Texas. So, my only link to that culture. Were my parents and my family, just within my immediate environment. And those behaviors, my responses to, to their my responses to their responses to be to the America is a huge part of how I understand being Filipino. I'll give you one example is the jokes. Filipino jokes are littered with puns, they're all wordplay. And it's in terms of my own humor that that's a fundamental layer right there. That those wordplay and then, so that kind of snowballed into my work through the usage of text, how I have how I would play around with text, how I would play around with different shapes of countries and kind of combine them. You know, like I remember making One map of the United States, and I just switched the I and the T. So instead of United States of America, it's an Untied States of America. And that would be a very good example of that wordplay. That's fairly ubiquitous in Filipino humor. But with the Texas culture one example I could just give right now is I have a piece in a group show at the ICA and San Jose, that has a lot of Confederate flags in the background. Confederate flags have almost nothing to do with Filipino culture, but it's definitely a huge part of Texan culture, and Southern culture. And that that piece was very, very much about reconciling my own Texas identity with my identity now, I mean, I made that piece maybe 10 or so years ago, so I'm different now than I am 10 years ago, but that was 10 years ago, but when I made that piece that was trying to Yeah, basically trying to reconcile my culture growing up in Texas, and how that can run contrary to my identity now, because I definitely don't identify with the Confederate flag now. But when I was a kid growing up in Texas, and watching shows like Dukes of Hazzard, or, you know, hee Ha, or whichever, you know, all of those were part of my experience growing up there and therefore part of my identity, and it's very hard to, to grew up with something like that as an identifier, only to have it kind of betray you, in the, in the contemporary

sense. And I always liken that feeling to when you have a hero that you look up to your whole life, and then all of a sudden, you you find out that they turned out to be a serial rapist, or have done something horrible in their in their life. And it changes your whole view of them and you feel betrayed as a fan. Because you've placed so much. You've placed so much faith, I suppose, in this person, it actually not into the person actually, in reality you're facing, you're putting all this faith into character, only to realize that that person runs contrary to that. And that's, that's, I guess that would be the best way to encapsulate what I feel about my Texan culture. Because yeah, I do feel heavily tied to it. But I also feel somewhat contrary to it in today's terms, but I feel a lot of Texans feel that way. And that's why Texas is, you know, becoming more of a purple state.

Nina Garcia 18:23

So, is there any roadblocks you feel you face specifically as an artist?

Lordy Rodriguez 18:32

Yeah, my own psychology. My own pathology, I think would be the thing that is the biggest roadblock. I mean, in terms of opportunities, and exposure. I feel like I've been very, very lucky and fortunate to receive the attention that I have since uh, you know, I had my I had my first solo show in 1999. And I was only, I think 20 At the time, I was really young. And, you know, just like with any career, there have been ups and downs throughout my whole career so far. But having a show or not having a show or a project to or a commission to work on, never stopped me from making work. I was always working, I was always making art. The only thing that's kept me from making art other than commitments that I would commit to would be my own laziness. That's a huge roadblock. But at the same time, it in my later life, I've come to embrace that part. I remember watching an interview with fan Leibovitz writer from New York and I think I think it was her that was saying that she, she was talking about how she loves smoking cigarettes. And I admit, I like to enjoy a cigarette now and then. But it was really the act of doing nothing, that she was really attracted to a cigarette affords you the ability to step outside of your current situation, right? If you're at work, or if you're anywhere at a party or club, and you want to take a break from everything, you go out for smoke. And it's a way to separate yourself from a situation and then just sit there doing a mundane task, and not do anything. And not doing anything is such an important part of being an artist, I've come to realize, because it's usually in those moments, where you're able to have a little interest introspection into something mundane. And it's in those mundane acts where we find something that can be applied to a much more larger idea. You know, try to think of a good example of something like that. But hopefully you get the idea. There was also who was it all someone else it Willem de Kooning, I think it was also saying that you, you can't, I might be wrong on this quote, though, but it's something to the effect of, you can't, you have to just be in your studio, even though no work is being made. But you're still working. Even though you're faffing around on the computer, or Instagram, which is a really big-time suck for me. But at the same time, I've also gotten so much out of that, you know, just blatant exploring on the computer, or, or in books, or whatever, you need that time to be able to ya introspect. So, something I would say would be a roadblock before I, I've come to embrace it as part of the process. I would like to, I think that would be the biggest roadblock I can think of. But then again, I don't think I'd be the same artists today, if I was working 12 hours a day, every day of the week, with no time set aside to explore, or think, you know.

Nina Garcia 22:49

Yeah. Trying to think of this philosopher, but there was one that I had made a statement on, you can't truly present your feelings in the moment you kind of have a wait till after and you dwell in them. And that's, I'm trying to think of who it was. But that's kind of what I

Lordy Rodriguez 23:09

Oh, that sounds familiar. Yeah.

Nina Garcia 23:11

That's kind of what I take away from how you describe it is you do have to kind of enjoy yourself and take that time away before you truly find value in it.

Lordy Rodriguez 23:22

Yeah, soak up every moment then introspect on it later.

Nina Garcia 23:26

Yeah, that's a good word to live by. Okay, so for the next set of questions, we're going to be looking into your place and in the community around you. So where do you go to practice your art?

Lordy Rodriguez 23:42

I have a studio, which is this is where I'm in right now. And before I used to always be in a separate building and a separate location from my home, but during right before COVID and my kids is going to, doing homeschool. So, my studio is here in my home now. And I love it. I really love being close to everything with my family and my backyard with I've got a bunch of chickens and garden and all this stuff going on in the backyard. So, I like being I like being here. But yeah, this is this is in the studios where I would do most of my work, where I spend most of my time.

Nina Garcia 24:31

Is there an organization that supports your work?

Lordy Rodriguez 24:36

I am represented by Hosfelt Gallery in San Francisco. [MTM: <https://hosfeltgallery.com/>] In my lifetime I've been represented by three galleries all together Fine Silver Gallery in Texas and Clementine Gallery in New York, both of which have closed down like I think that one of them closed down during the recession. One, yeah, also around that same time. But throughout the life throughout the, throughout my career, I've been supported by many institutions, maybe not consistently, like, you know, like an everyday thing, but like Artpace would be a residency program in San Antonio, where I've constantly, I don't show with them regularly. [MTM: <https://artpace.org/>] Because, you know, they have their own programming, and they can't always be showing Lordy Rodriguez. But they do they do often support me, and asked me to return for shows and stuff like I have a show there right now. But yeah, there are many institutions where I had, if not financial support, definitely. Artistic support. And the ICA in San Jose would be one of them. [MTM: <https://www.icasanjose.org/> in the SOFA district of downtown San Jose] I've had, I've been in multiple groups shows, I've even been curated a show. They're co curated a show there. And so yeah, there's that kind of support from institutions that, you know, are constantly. But we've been lucky enough to be at shows there. And then throughout my career, I guess the other kind of

institutional support I received was wherever I've been teaching. So, my previous teaching position was at San Jose State. And then at Berkeley and at Stanford. But other than "Oh," other than that, I would like to point out that I do support other institutions myself. So, I used to be on the board for Pro Arts in Oakland. And since COVID, they've dissolved we've had to do, organizations had to dissolve, which is an unfortunate since it's been around for over 40 years. Then, but currently, right now, I'm on the board for Arts Benicia, which is a wonderful little art space, nonprofit art space here in town in Benicia. [MTM: <https://artsbenicia.org/>] That's, that's also been around for 40 years. You know, there are so many nonprofit art spaces that are opening up across the United States in the 70s. And a good handful have been able to survive in our community. Arts Benicia is one of them. And I do I serve on the board and I'm I support that institution as much as I can to bring artists to Benicia, and then to bring artists from Benicia outside.

Nina Garcia 27:40

This next question is a little similar to what we have previously. But in your art, what influence does your culture have on what you do?

Lordy Rodriguez 27:55

What I do as an artist or what, what I do as a person?

Nina Garcia 27:59

What you do with your art.

Lordy Rodriguez 28:07

Yeah, I had mentioned before that the usage of wordplay and how he wordplay and puns play a large part of Filipina humor, and that's definitely I will repeat to you to be an obvious part of my work. If I find if I think of examples outside of that. Actually, I wouldn't even say just being Filipino, I would say being a colonized people. And I think that's one thing that Filipinos share with a lot of other cultures around this planet. And it didn't really creep into my work until later on. Later, until I became more when I started to incorporate more political issues into the work. Or I started to read more about colonialism, and how much that's affected. places like the Philippines because even if we look at Filipino culture now it's a more it's an amalgam of many different other conquering cultures, especially American culture. American culture is such a huge part of the Philippines. There's this strange idealization of Americans that I have always noticed growing up. And maybe that's why the very first series I did was so so heavily centered on the American identity, since it was an identity that sorry about that. Maybe the reason why I started off with my work with the very verse large series, which took about 10 years to complete was the America series, where I was reconstructing the United States. state by state, based off of my own history with this country. And growing up, there was always such a strong attraction towards being American. You know, be more American, you know, definitely don't talk with you know, don't talk in Tagalog. Definitely. You know, have as many American friends and that kind of thing. And, you know, this is similar to, I always assume with a lot of other immigrant families. But I also do remember in the background of that, a, you know, you could always disguise, disguise that under assimilation, but in Filipino culture, there is this fetishization of Americans and the American identity. And at that moment, growing up that identity are what define that American identity was the Texas identity. And it was such a huge culture shock for me, when I first moved to New York. I went to undergraduate school in New York. And then I

stayed there afterwards, I lived there for almost 10 years. It was so jarring for me to move from one part of America to another part and feel completely out of my environment, nothing seemed similar, that there were no similarities for me, you know, like, Texas, I would drive everywhere, New York, I would walk, the everything in Texas was very suburban, where everything in New York was very urban and dense, everything was contrary to each other. And so having to kind of deal with that and try to understand the American identity from the point of view, from a first-generation immigrant that was constantly being encouraged to be American. But at the same time, I had no idea what American meant and what it can imply. So, I think to answer your question, more succinctly, it would be rather not so much the particular Filipino cultural things that are in my work, but more of a colonial diaspora or oops, okay, sorry, pop up went up on my phone, more of the issues of colonialism and, and the result of being a colonized culture plays a lot into my work. From the very beginning, but not, but it's, it's been an ongoing exploration in how I kind of deal with or try to understand the results, or the effect of colonialism. Because I think that we will continue to see the results, or the effect of colonialism for quite a very long time, I think it's one of those things in human history that if we're able to stand way, way back and objectively look at its effect on our, on our, on our planet, on our world or global society. I think it's one of those things that surpasses almost any other global event other than climate change.

Nina Garcia 34:19

Is very generational, in a sense, the way colonial affects us.

Lordy Rodriguez 34:26

Yeah, and, you know, it's funny being a parent, now I'm starting to see how a lot of things are passed down from, from the parent to the child that aren't planned, or, you know, they just kind of happened naturally. And a lot of those a lot of the ways that people, especially when you're at the beginning stages of being colonized, how that kind of how that trauma passes down from generation to generation.

Nina Garcia 34:56

You know, it's it's definitely like I guess a newer movement to look pass generational trauma and kind of move forward but there's still is that need to recognize it in order to make those strides.

Lordy Rodriguez 35:10

Agreed. That's I think that's the biggest part really is just to recognize that it's there. Recognize where that behavior comes from, and that it is a form of trauma.

Nina Garcia 35:21

Yeah. So, it feels like such an awkward segue from

Lordy Rodriguez 35:31 I love awkward segues.

Nina Garcia 35:33

Don't we all. So, so who's your biggest artistic influences or just anyone you look into?

Lordy Rodriguez 35:44

Thoughts? Yeah, it depends. I guess it depends on what mood I'm in, I suppose or what time period you're asking me this. But from the very beginning, and you know, a lot, oddly a lot of minimalists were very influential to me. I grew up growing up and I guess I've mentioned many times, I grew up in Texas, but I also I grew up in Houston, and Houston is known for having the Menil Collection [MTM <https://www.menil.org/>], the Rothko Chapel [MTM: <https://www.rothkochapel.org/>], and other sites around the gallery, which is wasn't there when I was growing up. But I had gone there many times as an adult. And, you know, these are you know, these are institutions that have supported minimalism so much and so artists like Agnes Martin, has been a huge influence on me growing up. [MTM <https://www.moma.org/artists/3787>] Yeah, Bridget Riley is also another one who's the show I'm in at the ICA right now is a somewhat of a show that's an homage to Bridget Riley, and her aesthetic. [MTM <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/bridget-riley-1845>] Takashi Murakami would be another one that I love a lot growing up.[MTM: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takashi_Murakami] It's funny, I remember I was in ninth grade when I first learned about Damien Hirst,'s work.[MTM https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damien_Hirst] I wouldn't necessarily well I love a lot of the earlier works that he was doing with the animals and the large cages and stuff. Actually, I'm digressing because I don't wouldn't necessarily say he's a huge influence. But I definitely did love this work back then. And then you know, artists like Rashid Johnson and right now I think there is a wonderful explosion of artists that are from marginalized communities and people of color and I am loving all of it. There're so many artists right now like Deborah Roberts. [MTM: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deborah_Roberts_\(visual_artist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deborah_Roberts_(visual_artist))] I just love her collages and there's so many a lot of them are um, big fan so it's funny but yeah, especially right now there's so many female artists that I really love actually an artist that I had the I was lucky enough to be her T.A. when she was in undergraduate school and artists name Emma Webster [MTM: <https://www.emmawebster.com/>] . I just if you don't know her work, look her up. I love her paintings. These are large format landscape paintings that she creates using virtual reality. And or, yeah, and she uses the VR set and she would compose these paintings and paint them on, on Canvas, but the lighting, it's so unnatural, they're really quite beautiful. Trying to think of some more that I'm constantly influenced by a lot of artists all the time. Yeah, I wish I could think of some more but they're really like this. But I would say Agnes Martin would be a foundational influence in my work. Like she would be if something is so if I would say I would, I would build my aesthetic on she'd be one of the ones that were in that foundation.

Nina Garcia 39:35

And how would you other cultures or cultures outside of yours? influence your own work?

Lordy Rodriguez 39:55

That's a hard one to answer. So, I feel like that one requires academic study from my part, looking back on the work that I've already done, and seeing where those influences came from. I don't think I don't, I don't do that consciously in the, in the initial phases of the work, unless I'm working on something very specific. Maybe if I'm doing a work, if I were to do a work that was specifically about a certain country, then I would incorporate visual languages from that country into the work, but then that, I wouldn't necessarily say that's a cultural influence. Because I'm just dipping my toe in and out of that culture.

And I'm not really, I'm using it, it's a part of the research into the work that I'm doing. But it's not necessarily a cultural or personal influence. And there's a huge difference between the two. But at

the same time, not every single culture that you encounter would become, you know, personally influential. But in other aspects of my life there, I mean, there are, I mean, I would say, the, I don't know, I don't want to, I don't want to be accidentally dishonest about how I'm incorporating any of these other cultures into my own personal identity, I may have an affinity towards the Turkish culture. But that doesn't necessarily mean that is a part of my own identity. And that'd be unfair for me to kind of claim that. But one time, I mean, like one example I can think of in terms of the very first, the first example I gave, how I would use other cultures in my work, I did a globe of Texas. And I paired the, the top, I don't know, 10, or 20, Texas cities, with the top importers into Texas. So, these would be countries that are importing their goods into Texas. So, like the, the largest city in Texas is Houston, the number one importer to Texas is Mexico. So, when I created the this, this globe was made up of a whole bunch of continents, and each continent was named after one of the cities of Texas. So that'd be a continent of Houston. And the way I would draw that continent with like I would I would put a design or pattern of

some sort into each continent to as a way to differentiate each continent from each other. And I wouldn't, I would, I would fill those shapes with cultural, cultural, visual, it's a it's a good way to say, visual languages from each of those countries into each into like I say, Houston, so for. So, Mexico was the number one importer. So, I had used a lot of colors and stripes from the let's say, the large tablecloths or blankets. Serape? Is that what they're called?

Nina Garcia 43:52 Serape.

Lordy Rodriguez 43:53

Yeah, with all the different striations of colors and lines, and I incorporated a lot of those patterns into that continent. So, I, I would choose the most easily identifiable cultural pattern for each of those countries that I would use. And then, you know, pair them up with a Texan city. But I wouldn't say that would be a personal influence or anything like that. It was purely academic and playing around more with stereotypes, essentially, of culture. So yeah, that's a that's a much more nuanced question. I would say that would require a little more introspection on my part on breaking that, breaking those that down in my previous work, and seeing where those other influences come from. But on the surface, I don't know. Yeah, sorry. That's a long-winded way to say I don't know.

Nina Garcia 44:59

I know I understand it and I was looking at your posters. What for the San Francisco Art commission?

Lordy Rodriguez 45:08 Yeah.

Nina Garcia 45:08

I was noticing how like, for example, you had the Harvey Milk Plaza and had like all the pride colors or for Chinatown it had like, the different fonts and like, I guess more Asian like textiles, patterns of it. And I think it does go into like our perception of other cultures. Like

Lordy Rodriguez 45:29

I think he chose a really wonderful example of precisely what I was just talking about. Because you those six neighborhoods from that series, we're the name of that series is called Strangerhood,

which comes from a sociologist Alfred Serbinski. [MTM: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Strangerhood] Now, I'm forgetting his I'm mispronouncing his name, Korzybski [MTM: See Tibor Dessewffy, "An Essay in the Sociology of Knowledge" . Anyway, he really wrote this great essay that I read about the role of the stranger walking into a neighborhood. And there is this interaction between the community, the locals and the stranger. And both influence each other. And, you know, neighborhoods, like the Fisherman's Wharf is a neighborhood people do live there. But it is a neighborhood that caters to the stranger to the tourists, the visitor. And if I, if I were going to basically make a portrait of six neighborhoods that number one, I don't live in either one of them. Number two, I've probably spent time in certain some of those neighborhoods. But you know, that each of those visits are probably very fleeting, not very personal. Going back to Fisherman's Wharf, you know, being a tourist there. So, I knew right, I knew right away that the role that I was embodying when I was making these kind of neighborhood portraits was that of a stranger, that is an outsider. And so when you're looking at places like Chinatown, and there are a lot of this Asian aesthetics, that they are, from the strangers' point of view, kind of like the representation, the representative of that culture for us at that moment. And because of that it can it's susceptible to being a stereotype or overly representative, where it, maybe it's not in reality. But to go back to your previous question, I often find myself in the role of the stranger when I'm looking at other cultures. And I think that's why I was hesitant to answer that, because I don't want to misrepresent myself or any of the other cultures that I'm working with. Because even though I may have, I've done a lot of work, where I've added a lot of, let's say, characters from other languages, but I, those are languages that I don't speak all the time, I'm they're not part of my everyday lexicon. So, they're not part of my culture. There is, there is a usage of it, and acknowledgement of those other cultures. But I have to, I have to admit, my own relation to a lot of cultures outside of being Filipino and Texan that I'm just a tourist. You know, I go in and out. And I tried to acknowledge and understand my relationship that was conscious, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I've adopted, adopted any of those cultures into my own. Takes a while. I mean, I think it's taken a while for me to adopt the California culture into my own identity. And I've been here for 20 years now.

Nina Garcia 49:28

Yeah, culture is just such a continuous movement. It's never really stagnant. And it's based on these just compiling experiences.

Lordy Rodriguez 49:39 Yeah.

Nina Garcia 49:40

What would you want the next generation of people, maybe in your culture that identify with similar aspects maybe not fully exact to take away from your work?

Lordy Rodriguez 50:06

You know, I. Oh, man, I don't know. I think as an artist, I hope future generations would take from my work and an approval for play and experimentation and failure that has consequences to it. Not necessarily consequences that you can control. Maybe just a realization that your exploration as an artist, my exploration as an artist matter in the sense that it influences our culture, or influences our society or community in some way. I think as an artist, my biggest hope is just to be able to contribute to the community that I'm in, in any way that I can or in any way in any capacity. What that

contribution is, I don't know. I mean, sometimes there are, you know, concrete contributions, you know, that you're going for. Right. But in the larger sense, if you're talking generationally, and in a longer timescale, I would, I think that's what I would hope most artists would take from me is just this. Yeah, this personal freedom and approval to is to play and fail, but with cultural or communal influence, as a result of that play. But as a as an artist, as a person, as a Filipino. Yeah, I would, I would hope that future generations of, you know, Filipino Americans. If I can aspire to, to influence any future generations of Filipino Americans, it would be it would be the freedom to be who you are regardless of what other constraints are on you, culturally, that the burden of representation isn't on just you. I wouldn't, I wouldn't want that burden to be placed on anyone. I don't think it's fair to have, you know, one person that becomes very successful, and then all of a sudden that person becomes the sole representation of a whole culture. So, yeah, I think as a Filipino American, I would hope future generations would release that burden. And be the person that you are knowing that whoever you are, contributes to the definition of that identity of being Filipino American, not burdened by it. So, in my own life, I would follow my own interests, my own explorations and have that define what it means to be Filipino America rather than following a set, set rulebook and that hadn't had that definition of what it means to be Philippine American.

Nina Garcia 54:48

So, I know you mentioned that you have worked with Pro Arts and Arts Benicia, could you tell me a little bit more about the organizations. I know you said Pro Arts went out. Maybe we could expand a little on Arts Benicia really quick.

Lordy Rodriguez 55:07

Yeah. I just finished. Actually, it was a small nonprofit art space. Last year, we moved into a very large, much more larger building tripling our space. It's one of those nonprofits that the community heavily relies on. There's a very large art community here. A lot of artists that have studios in the arsenal buildings, and all around town. And there's also been a pretty notable number of artists that have gone through or passed through Benicia doing projects or lived here for a moment. And Arts Benicia has always been one of those institutions that have been a part of those artists lives. So I know you know, Judy Chicago was here for a while, Manuel Neri. [MTM:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manuel_Neri] Liking but there's been quite a number of Linda Fleming there's a good number of artists that have called Benicia home. And, you know, I remember when I was in graduate school, we had a curator of his name is Renny Pritikin who came to visit us. [MTM: <https://openspace.sfmoma.org/author/renny/>]

And he gave us a sheet, a sheet of paper that had all of these tips on being an artist, or like things you should do or something like that. And one of them was remember it saying is finding your community. And I think having a community is very important for not just any artists, but for any person. And Arts Benicia is, is a really good central focal point for the art, the artist community here. But also, even within the context of being in Benicia, I'm an artist but then I'm also a dad so a lot of the other social circles that I'm in here in Benicia revolve around my family and my kids and, and their activities. And I've been lucky enough to contribute to the art education side of Arts Benicia. So, my we have these things called family art days, that corresponds with every exhibit. And I bring my kids to that a lot of the times I've planned a few of them. And so, it's really wonderful to be able to have both sides of my, my social both sides of my social circles here in Benicia into what I do with Arts Benicia. I guess what else can I say about? It is well, it is a really great space, though, for

bringing people to Benicia from the region. And outside. When we whenever we have a juried show or a curated show, where we would invite a curator to come and put together an exhibit. These are really great interactions that's really important for the community here. It's great when we have right now, we have a show up at Arts Benicia called next generation, which is a show of artworks from all the public schools, actually, yeah, all the public schools and private schools in town. along and this is the first year where we invited artists that have graduated from any of the schools here and have continued making art. And that's the first this is the first year we we've incorporated it into this show. So, and then another exhibit that we have annually is called Art of the Community which is a show all the local artists in town can submit work for and we have a wide range, age wise of artists that live here.[MTM: <https://artsbenicia.org/art-of-a-community-2023/>] And so, through this programming, starting with art education, and then some of the other annual or biannual shows that we have really addresses all parts of the community in terms of age, where Arts Benicia can play some influence on the children as well as adults and, and artists already in their elderly age. And so, it is it is very much a communal institution. So glad to be a part of it. And to play a part in its evolution. Yeah.

Nina Garcia 1:00:42

Okay, as promised, we're in the final lap of questions.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:00:46

And please tell me if I have a feeling my answers are really, really long. So, let's slim them down.

Nina Garcia 1:00:52

I got I got all day. I just don't want to take up your time.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:00:56 Oh, no, I'm good on time, too.

Nina Garcia 1:01:01

So in addition to this interview, would you be willing to share any kind of photos of your work that you'd like to be in the map? It's completely optional.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:01:10

Oh, sure. Of course, just let me know what you would you know, any, any work that you're interested in? Just, yeah, just choose everything from the website and be available to you. Although right now, I hope no one else is experiencing well, I, I save all of my information on my own personal cloud server using Western Digital. and Western Digital was just hacked a couple of days ago. And so, everything is closed down. So, I don't have any access to any of my files. So yep, pick any image that you like, or group of images. And I'll see if I can find copies of them somewhere. But just know, there might be a chance that I might not have it until the servers are back up again.

Nina Garcia 1:02:05

Yeah, no, it's no issue. And if there's something you would prefer to be on, there are more than happy to have it on. Okay.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:02:14 I'll try to think of some.

Nina Garcia 1:02:17

You know, once we get that organized, I'll just send out a form just to like another consent form, just in addition to that photograph. Yeah. Is there anyone else you believe we should contact for this project?

Lordy Rodriguez 1:02:31

Well, um, could you explain to me the project a little bit more?

Nina Garcia 1:02:35

Yeah, it's a cultural Atlas. So, we're documenting various groups within the Bay Area. So, we're looking at, for example, downtown San Jose, Japan town. Yeah. we're looking at Muslim communities, Muwekma Ohlone, kind of have like a variety of them. But it's all to get voices on artists, organizers, different people that take form, take part in the art process, and get their voices on how that correspond to of culture and their experiences.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:03:13

Great. You should look at an artist in New York. Her name is Natalia Nazakawa. [MTM: <http://www.natalianakazawa.com/>] N-a-z-a-k-a-w-a. Who did a she did this really great large world map. I may be wrong in this detail. But I think it was a diaspora map of the Philippines where she was taking interviews and stories from Oh no, just Filipino artists, I think it was all artists, all kinds, but she was incorporating their stories, their cultural stories into this map. And then she also incorporated all of this cultural imagery, and all of these locations. And on top of that there was an AR component where you put your phone in front and then you could look at all of these objects in relation to the map. But yeah, when you were first describing this project to me, that was one of the first things that popped in my head was her project. But in terms of other people or other artists to talk to. Man. Well, who have you spoken to so far? Maybe that's a better question.

Nina Garcia 1:04:52

Well, we've spoken to a lot of people actually.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:04:54

Have you spoken to Binh Danh at all? (MTM: <https://binhdanh.com/>)

Nina Garcia 1:04:57

No, I do not believe any of us have.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:05:00

Do you know his work? Are you guys familiar?

Nina Garcia 1:05:03

I have heard the name I have not seen any of his work.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:05:08

Binh is he's, he's, he teaches at San Jose State. He's a social professor there now. We're also alumni, we're both. We all are both the same from the same graduate program at Stanford. Binh is Vietnamese American, he grew up in San Jose. So, you know that there's this really strong

Vietnamese and, and Mexican communities in San Jose and how they intermingle together. And he grew up there. So, he would be a really great person to talk to, I think.

Nina Garcia 1:05:45

Ok I'll look into talking to him.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:05:49

Yeah, let me know if you need his contact information. I'd love to introduce you.

Nina Garcia 1:05:53

Okay, that's wonderful. Thank you. Yeah, I'm intrigued by it now.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:06:00

Yeah, really, really beautiful work. Are you looking at any of them right now?

Nina Garcia 1:06:05

I should, my apartment walls are barren.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:06:12

What he does is he uses photographic processes, on leaves. So, like he'll take, he'll take a whole bunch of negatives from his family archives of you know, what's going on his family's life during the war, the Vietnam War, and then or maybe the results after the Vietnam War, and then take those negatives and put them on top of leaves. And this time would create the photographic image on the leaf by drying it out. So, you end up with these haunting images on the sleeves? Yeah, really beautiful work.

Nina Garcia 1:06:57

They are beautiful. Like, you know, are it's just interesting how everyone interprets the world. It's really interesting to see insights on that.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:07:10

Oh, yeah. Yeah. It's the ultimate human thing to do, I think.

Nina Garcia 1:07:15

Yeah, it's definitely like a look into someone else's mind.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:07:20

Yeah, it really is. I'm glad that it doesn't have any utility towards it. You know, like, there's no reason, like there's no use for it, in terms of utilitarian sense, doesn't have a purpose. And I think that's where the beauty in it lies, that it doesn't have to be a purposeful thing. It's just an expression. Like it'll leave it at that.

Nina Garcia 1:07:43

Put it? Yeah. Okay. So this will be their last question. In regards to the interview, is there anything I

haven't asked you that you would like to just discuss or put out there?

Lordy Rodriguez 1:08:01

Oh, I think I just want to reiterate the two points. I think we're kind of for me guiding points in my own life. You know, the first one being, that your own cultural identity is not a burden. If you are actively contributing to it. So, I think ever since I've kind of taken that on, as a personal mantra, it's been, it's been so much more freeing, being Filipino, because now it feels like I'm adding to the cup instead of trying to replicate the cup. And the other part would be that, you know, that that freedom of play and failure, and that is integral to community and to our evolution as a society. So keep on keepin on, I guess.

Nina Garcia 1:09:13

Well, thank you, I really do appreciate you taking the time out of your day for this.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:09:19 Thanks for the great questions.

Nina Garcia 1:09:22

No problem, I'm going to transcribe the interview. And once that's complete in a few days, I'll send that out to you just so you could kind of have a visual of how everything looks

Lordy Rodriguez 1:09:32

Great, wonderful. And if you see any images that you would want to get, you know, like to use, let me know.

Nina Garcia 1:09:38

Okay, thank you. Well, you have a lovely day. Hopefully. It stays nice outside. It's getting kind of bright again.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:09:48

Yeah, it is so nice outside. Yeah, beautiful day.

Nina Garcia 1:09:53 Thank you. Take care.

Lordy Rodriguez 1:09:55

You too. Enjoy your day. Bye bye.