

THE FILIPINO E-MAGAZINE IN EUROPE

Roots & wings

CULTURE PEOPLE PLACES

-on this issue-

KENNETH JOHN MONTEGRANDE

ZIP MERCADO

ASTRID ASKERT

ALIENETTE COLD FIRE

April of 2019

Dear Kababayans



**Warm welcome to
R&Ws April 2019
issue.**

After living in Europe for four decades I found myself free to be where I want to be. Nowadays, spring and summer are spent in Sweden while autumn and winter are spent in the Philippines. Being in the best of both worlds demand resiliency, flexibility and open mindedness on a daily basis.

As I traverse these countries, on flip-flops or sheep-skin boots, encountering extreme climate changes from too hot to too cold, from typhoons to snow storms, while enjoying amazing natural wonders, encountering fascinating cultures and unique mind sets, to name but a few, I always find myself surprised at our shared similarities. I have noticed that whether one comes from the remotest of islands or from the grandest of cities, whether living in a tiny bamboo hut or a huge stone house, whether literate or illiterate, we react similarly to life's triumphs and disasters. We laugh, we cry, we do something, we do nothing. Yes, wherever we are, whether we know it or not, we have the power to make changes, the power to improve the quality of life on Earth. A great many of us are doing that while many of us are still taking pictures.

A few years ago, I had the pleasure of meeting Zip Mercado de Guzman when he was much younger and had his eyes set on conquering the world through his golden voice. I knew then that he was going to be a star. Read about Zip's journey half the world, as he harvests laurels upon laurels of awards and recognitions for sharing his divine gift of music. Our heartfelt congratulations to Zip and we wish him all the best as he continues to wow us.

Meet Astrid Askert, a 20-year old Filipina-Swedish designer student who has been stunning the fashion and design world with her fun creations at H&M, one of the biggest fashion companies in the world. Thank you Astrid for being an inspiration, a source of pride and joy to our community.

We thank Lorna Real for her colorful article about the town of Sintra. Makes us want to pack our bags and visit Portugal soon.

Also, we welcome Dr. David Jonathan Bayot to our magazine with his interview of up-and-coming Filipino contemporary artist Kenneth John Montegrando who has been included to one of the world's most celebrated art collections.

Springtime is here. Don't forget to enjoy tulips, magnolias, camellias, wisterias.

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contents

FEATURED ARTIST

Kenneth John Montegrando, pg. 4
Zip Mercado de Guzman, pg. 12
Astrid Askert, pg. 18

NEWS

Alienette Coldfire, pg. 20
Viva Europa, pg. 21

TRAVEL

Sintra, Portugal, pg. 22

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Roots&Wings Filipino Magazine in Europe



ART IN CONVERSATION WITH

KENNETH JOHN MONTEGRANDE

The artist in conversation with **David Jonathan Bayot | Manila**

It's fairly straightforward to name the important Filipino painters in the "familiar canon" of Philippine painting when we're talking about artists born before 1970: Juan Luna (1857-1899), Fernando Amorsolo (1892-1972), Anita Magsaysay Ho (1914-2012), Arturo Luz (b. 1926), Ang Kiukok (1931-2005), Benedicto Cabrera or BenCab (b. 1942), Pacita Abad (1946-2004), and Elmer Borlongan (b. 1967). It's however a little tricky when one attempts to "name" that canon so to speak after painters born in the seventies onward.

While I'm aware that offering names beyond the familiar canon is to a large extent a provisional gesture—after all, whatever names I give are still very much "works in progress"—still, there are certain names that I'd like to put forward in this "Art in Conversation (Philippines)" column for my readers. I would say that these are artists whose works prompted me to want to understand the intentions that enliven (in quite a literal sense) their creations and, in

turn, to present these intentions or passions to the readers in as direct a manner as possible—that is, via conversation and illustration.

In this first feature, I'd like to present a conversation I had with a Filipino painter—the first Southeast Asian artist whose works, a total of six, are included in the prestigious contemporary art collection of Japanese billionaire and art connoisseur Yusaku Maezawa.

His name is Kenneth John Montegrando. His style is abstract expressionism. And his primary art mentor is someone he met in 2012 when he was thirty-three—and that’s himself. Here’s how the rest of the story goes ...

DAVID JONATHAN BAYOT: Maybe you’d like to begin in medias res by telling us what your creative process is like. How do you go about choosing a subject for your painting? And since you consider yourself an abstract expressionist, maybe my question should be: as an abstract painter, do you think you engage in the act of painting because you have a subject in the first place or a theme (sorry to sound so prosaic) that you want to convey to an audience?

KENNETH JOHN MONTEGRANDO: Oh wow! David, that’s quite an academic question. I’m not surprised that you’re the one asking it. But to be fair to your readers, let me say at the outset that I’m a painter. Even if I was a public relations guy before I started painting, language the way you used it is foreign to me. In short, since I’m not a theory person, an academic, or an art history enthusiast like you; I hope you don’t mind putting up with my painter’s mode of expression and response, as you’ve always done.

I appreciate paintings with “subjects” (for instance, J.M.W. Turner’s famous *The Fighting Temeraire*). And I certainly feel a strong passion for those “without a subject” or, better, those without a “definite” subject (such as an *Improvisation* piece of Vasily Kandinsky). Maybe it’s important to mention that although I’ve time and again referred to myself as an abstract expressionist, I would also say I’m an impressionist or, in fact, a romantic just like my hero Turner! Honestly, I share the view of

the art scholar Susie Hodge, who thinks that romanticism, impressionism, and abstract expressionism can be viewed as occupying the same continuum.

More often than not, I really have no specific subject or concept in mind when I start painting, unless I’m doing so to fulfill a collector’s set of preferences as regards a certain color scheme, a certain theme (as you would have it)... While it’s true that many of my paintings carry titles that are indicative of certain subjects like silence, insomnia, mystery of life, solitude—generally, these themes come after the painting process has been completed. By saying that, I don’t want to give you the impression that I start a painting in a state of *tabula rasa*. I certainly have some “notions” in mind, although I wouldn’t say they’re “concepts.” Most if not all those notions are emotionally charged. And if you insist on a description of my creative process, I would say that the process of my painting is one of translating those notions—most of them unidentifiable or unnameable—into strokes and colors of my preference. I mention “my preference” because some would say that my paintings remind them of those by Betsy Westendorp, or Kandinsky, or Robert Rauschenberg. I’m of course very flattered to be associated with these great names, but the truth is, I didn’t have them in mind when I was doing those paintings. In fact, I got to know about many of them much later. Maybe my set of preference happens to be theirs too!



Gratitude, 2018

Acrylic on canvas, Ronald Garcia collection

But let me go back to the “notions” I mentioned earlier. When I was painting *On Extended Wings* (which is now in your collection), I wasn’t really thinking of Wallace Stevens’s “Sunday Morning” as you did after you saw the piece. I was filled with notions and images of darkness, light, struggle, surfacing, drowning...while I was painting the piece. It’s only after I showed the painting to you and we started to discuss about Stevens’s poem and one’s voluntary descent into the earth of darkness or death “on extended wings” as a path to light and meaning that I began to recognize in hindsight what was going on in my system when I was painting that piece.

I don’t know how else I can explain the process of executing my creative intention to you. But maybe I should put it as plainly as I am used to: during the process of artistic creation, I’m filled with emotionally charged notions. And in the end, I want my audience to see and feel the various ways I translate those notions. I don’t know if they ever feel the electricity of the process, but I’d be so happy if they do.

BAYOT: I think I understand what you’re getting at when you tried to clarify your creative process with the term “notion.” But still, I’d like to ask you something only a painter can answer. After all, “notion” is



On Extended Wings, 2018

Acrylic on canvas, David Jonathan Bayot collection

something literary critics like me consume and live or die for. What exactly inspires or compels your creation? Is it your fascination with colors and the exploration of their potential to evoke “basic human emotions” as in the case of Mark Rothko? Or is it, like John Ursillo, a passion for light and the various ways it could shed light on his subject and composition?

MONTEGRANDE: I like what you said about Rothko’s artistic motivation. I agree with him. I see colors as carriers of meanings. Since one of

my clearest intentions as a painter is to “force” the viewers to see the value or particularity of a specific moment or experience in life so that in the end they’ll re-cognize the beauty of living or being alive, my key medium to translate those intentions is color. Regarding light, basically I still see it as an extension of my color treatment as a painter.

If you wish, I’ll say the same thing as what you’ve told me about Aristotle’s view of literature or art in general in *Poetics*. I want my art to evoke something that speaks to

or about my fellow human beings, from the particular strokes, shapes, and colors that I use as a painter.

BAYOT: I'd say that the part you discussed about human beings is clear. My concern now is to ask you—what is a good composition for you? Non-painters can talk about human beings, but I'm sure a painter's version has some different elements or emphases in it.

MONTEGRANDE: That's certainly another academic question. I'll do my best to say something that won't upset you too much.

A good composition for me is something that I can call MY composition. In fact, I owe that idea to you when you mentioned to me about the painter Peter Flaccus and his explanation of "the perfect painting." What is a perfect or original painting? Remember what you sent me by Flaccus? It's about "a new picture space, with specific new confines, characteristics, and rules." Various individuals specifically painters have various picture spaces, as you explained. One has particular way of doing things that makes one an individual. While I admire Jackson Pollock very much and find his drip technique liberating and inspiring, I must come to terms with the fact that I'm Kenneth Montegrande and not Jack the Dripper. While I take inspirations from the styles of various abstract expressionists, I still wouldn't want to be a Willem de Kooning or a Clyfford Still or a Franz Kline for the simple reason that I'm not interested in transforming myself into being one of them, no matter how much I look up to them. Would I say that I already know what I am exactly in terms of a Montegrande picture space? It's too early to say. Besides, I believe you completely when you said that the

moment one becomes so sure of one's picture space, then one is not far from being a dead meat. Although you're talking about literary critics then, I think that view is as valid to painters and artists as well.

BAYOT: Now, let's talk about your citizenship in the art community. What artists influence your work most?

MONTEGRANDE: As you know, I'm a Mass Communication graduate and I'm not as learned as I should be in art history or the canon (as you put it)—the various movements and the must-know personalities of each movement. In fact, I got to know about van Gogh's *The Starry Night* after I heard Don McClean's "Vincent"! Isn't that strange!

In November 2012, while I was performing my role as the events and media strategist of the Intramuros Administration, an agency affiliated with the Department of Tourism, I found myself inspired by the artworks of the Filipino artists who were exhibiting in the Intramuros Arts Festival. The festival was organized by the IA and the Intramuros Visual Artists Philippines (IVAP) in conjunction with the National Commission for the Culture and the Arts (NCCA). In this event, I got the chance to meet notable artists of the like of Pancho Piano from Bicol, Al Perez from Bulacan, and Nemesio R. Miranda, Jr. or Nemiranda. I was so inspired by their works and their words of encouragement, and the following week, I found myself purchasing materials for my own art making! That experience was euphoric! And that's how I began as a painter.

As I moved along the art-making path, I would meet fellow artists, collectors, and gallery

owners who like what I'm doing. They would tell me that my paintings reminded them of so-and-so's work. And that compelled me to look up and read up on these painters. In short, the education route I've taken is quite disorderly, don't you think?

I don't have a straight answer to your question on which artists influence me. To be safe, I would say that I find the works of the following painters inspiring and evocative: J.M.W. Turner, Jackson Pollock, and Willem de Kooning. And it's up to you and the readers to decide if I'm being influenced by them or not. I want to say that their works compel me to take light and color, human drama, and freedom of artistic expression seriously.

BAYOT: Having taken quite an unusual path to where you are now, in your profession as a painter, how do you, a "late bloomer" of a painter, manage to get yourself known in a highly populated and diversified Philippine art space?

MONTEGRANDE: I know what you mean. It's a little tricky for a self-taught artist like me to find a place for myself and my art in a community inhabited by SO MANY talented artists. I knew practically nobody in the art world. I didn't have powerful connections to usher me into the art scene and introduce me to its prevailing system. For that reason, I thought I should fend for myself and do things my way. Given my background as a journalist, publicist, and event organizer, I capitalize on technology and social media. And that's how I got my work known to Yusaku Maezawa. Through my persistent effort to get my work known in the art/social circles,

my art is gradually gaining an audience, and honestly, I'm just so grateful to God for all these things that are happening to me! I get to do something I love, I get people to love the things I do, and I'm being paid for love!!

BAYOT: It's all about love! So let's dwell on it then! Tell me, what is the best part about being a painter?

MONTEGRANDE: Oh, the best part! What could that be? Other than what I just mentioned to you—being paid to do things that I love and getting the things I love loved by friends and strangers—I think the other part of that so-called best experience is to find various parts of me in the homes of various appreciative individuals! Now, I sound very much like Voldemort distributing fragments of his soul and placing them in various objects as horcruxes for the purpose of attaining immortality!! Thanks for successfully transforming me into a Dark wizard in the course of this conversation, David!

This interview is an excerpt from a book on The Art of Kenneth John Montegrando, a forthcoming publication under the Contemporary Filipino Artists series published by De La Salle University Publishing House.

David Jonathan Bayot is is the Go Kim Pah Professor of Chinese Literature and the Liberal Arts at De La Salle University, where he is also the Executive Publisher of its university press. He is the general editor of the Critical Voices series published by Sussex Academic Press.

(Opposite)

Beauty Behind Madness, 2017

Acrylic on canvas, Remigio David collection





ZIP

Cipriano “Zip” Mercado de Guzman,
a professor of the Liceo de Cagayan
University Conservatory of Music, Theater
& Dance has won the top prize at the 17th
Rome International Music Competition.

as interviewed by **Rachel Hansen** | Stockholm

MERCADO

Zip was awarded first prize in the
Senior/Professional Open Category at
the 2018 Rome International Music
Competition Grand Prize Virtuoso held
at the Teatro Studio, Parco de la Musica,
Rome, Italy last December 18, 2018.

DE

GUZMAN

**1ST PRIZE WINNER AT THE 17TH ROME INTERNATIONAL
MUSIC COMPETITION-GRAND PRIZE VIRTUOSO**

All my performances and Operas are just a gift from God in addition to achieving my goal to teach and share to the vast majority of young musicians.



"I sang the recitativo and aria from the Opera Macbeth "Perfidi All'anglo contro me v'unite, Pieta, rispetto amore" by Giuseppe Verdi.

Started in 2013, the International Music Competition "Grand Prize Virtuoso" is open to all nationalities and ages in strings, piano, wind, vocal and chamber music discipline: (piano, violencelo, double bass, guitar, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, saxophone, recorder, French horn, trumpet, trombone, tuba, piano duo, piano four-hands, mixed ensembles, female voice and male voice). The competition has attracted musicians from more than 60 countries all over the world.

Before returning to his students at Liceo de Cagayan, Zip visited Dieppe, Rouen, Normandy, Toulouse, Lyon and Paris, France, then Andorra La Vella Principat d'Andorre where he sang at the Catholic Mass and a Christmas Concert in Sant Pau, Barcelona, Spain last December 23, 2018.

R&W: Our heartfelt congratulations Zip for this most prestigious award. We are so proud of you and we Euro-Pinoys are looking forward to more of your European performances. But to be a music professor and an opera singer must be a very tough combination. How did it all began?

Zip: I started as a boy soprano when I was in elementary and joined church choirs. I realized I needed to help church musicians and to realize this dream, I worked really hard to finish my musical studies at University of Santo Tomas Conservatory of Music where I finished 2 Bachelor's Degrees with honors (cum laude), further studies in the UK, 2 Masters Degrees in Music with the highest distinction; at Elisabeth University of Music in Japan and at Conservatori Superior de Música del Liceu de Barcelona. Like my other interviews with different newspapers and in radio interviews, unlike my colleagues and contemporaries, their goal is to perform and be well-known, whereas my goal is to be good at what I do so I can be a good teacher/professor and share the knowledge and expertise/ experiences to the younger generation of Filipino singers. All my performances and Operas are just a gift from God in addition to achieving my goal to teach and share to the vast majority of young musicians.

You have received multiple scholarships, grants and other awards from many countries. Please tell us more about these.

I was blessed with so many scholarships although I must admit I really had a tough time while I was studying. At University of the East where I finished my first Bachelor's Degree in Communication Arts; I was a University of the East Chorale scholar then shifted to become an academic scholar until I graduated. I worked

in call centers such as Teleperformance and was an HR Specialist at IBM before graduating in college (my first Bachelor's degree) then continued working at IBM at night while taking up Music at UST in the morning until 2008 where I received a full-scholarship grant from the Klassikal Music Foundation of Dr. George T. Yang of McDonald's Philippines. I was part of the first batch of scholars after a tough audition. Then, after I finished my 2 Bachelor's Degrees in Music at UST, I auditioned in different universities in the UK and the US and was offered different scholarships and grants. However, most of them are not full-scholarships so instead, I attended the Vocal Summer Program in Cardiff, UK then accepted the full-scholarship grant at Elisabeth University of Music in Japan. Then, several other grants and opportunities opened up for me.

What is the most positive part of being in this profession? Are there any negative experiences worth sharing?

The best part is traveling around the world and meeting or performing with different celebrities both local and international, meeting diplomats, high-ranking government officials and famous public figures. On the other hand, there are so many negative experiences such as no financial support from the government when you are starting in your career and I have to work in different part-time jobs to pay for my miscellaneous fees, cost of living in other countries and participation in competitions. I was also bullied and became a victim of racism.

Do you have any role models in the world of music and in your everyday life? Why?

Yes, I have a lot. I can't name them one by one because everyone has their own strengths and

set of struggles as well. I idolize my mom, who's my pillar of strength, as well as my former teachers including Maestra Irma Ponce-Enrile Potenciano, Korean Baritone Park Byeong-in and Soprano Rachelle Gerodias, Tenor Abdul Candao, Jun Jaranilla, Maestra Josefina Garlit-Bailen, Agnes Barredo-Fenoli, Dr. Antonio Hila, Randy Gilongo, Pablo and Camille Lopez-Molina, Arthur Espiritu, Noel Azcona, Catalan Baritone Joan Martin-Royo and Spanish Mezzo Soprano Maestra Teresa Berganza, and Japanese Baritone Hiroharu Orikawa and Soprano Hiroko Hayama.

What are your dreams and aims for the future?

I still want to pursue further studies and finish either Doctor of Music Education or Doctor of Musical Studies in Europe so I can further enhance my knowledge and share more to my future students. I also wish to experience more lecture-performances like what I did last year and join more Opera productions around the world. I already have 2 music scholars and I plan to help more poor but deserving music students to continue their studies through my own Filipino Baritone Music Scholarship Program (which I recently started). I would like to help more charities and NGO's (Non-government organizations), proceeds of most of my previous concerts and performances around the world went to charities such as for victims of calamities in the Philippines, refugees from different parts

of the world, and for medical missions in war-torn Marawi City.

Any words of wisdom and advice to aspiring Filipino opera singers out there who are working hard to conquer Europe and the rest of the world?

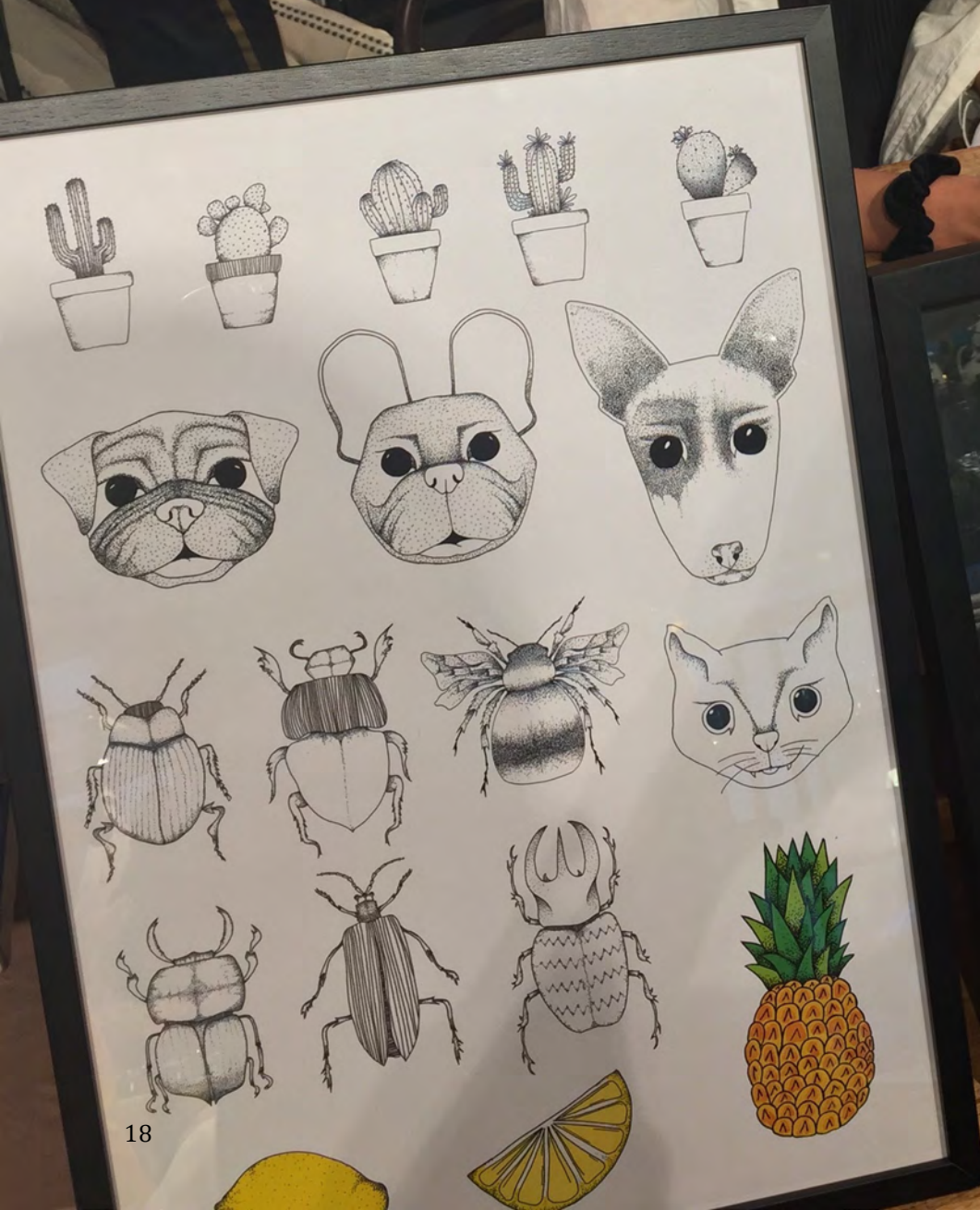
Be true to yourself, don't copy, be natural. Work really hard to accomplish your dreams in spite of all the challenges, be focused on your goals and help each other to fulfill each others' dreams. Don't be overly competitive and always look back, be grateful to all the people who will help you along the way. Always be professional and humble. And the most important of all, realize that God is in the center of your mere existence, and He entrusted you with talent to be a channel of His blessings, so we don't have the right to be overly proud. We have to use this gift entrusted to us to touch the soul of humanity and uplift the lives of many people.

Thank you Zip, it has been a great honor and pleasure meeting you. God continue to bless you mightily as you generously share your divine gift of music to all, bringing joy and hope to our sometimes weary and hopeless world.

*Reference: By the Night Stalker, Mindanao Daily,
Sat-Sun Jan 5-6, 2019*

“Be true to yourself, don't copy, be natural. Work really hard to accomplish your dreams in spite of all the challenges, be focused on your goals and help each other to fulfill each others' dreams.”





Här kan du få
ett personligt
tryck på livsa
textilier
- utan extra
kostnad.

Astrid Askert x

as interviewed by Ann Dahlgren | Stockholm

The East blends with the West in a lovely combination of culture that brought Astrid into this world. Half Filipina and half Swedish, Astrid Askert gets her fire and passion from her Filipino blood and her reflective and calm side from her Swedish side.

Astrid was born in Manila to a Swedish father, Måns and Filipina mother Aya Sunga Askert. She grew up in Sweden, studied Visual studies at Stockholm University and currently studies Visual Communication at the exclusive Beckmans College of Design in Stockholm.

Only 20, Astrid is riding high. When H&M, the iconic global design and fashion company founded in Sweden, went looking for Creatives, as part of their goal to encourage and attract young talents to create and design for the company, Astrid caught H&M's attention. It has been a stunning and successful collaboration and more projects are planned for the near future.

RW: Why do you do what you do?

AA: I follow my passion - my love for design and visual communication. Right now, I am now studying and getting my BFA has led me to try all sorts of things that I love like doing motion graphics and animation design.

Who are your biggest influences?

My mom. Since I was little I have been watching her express herself through her art and poetry, which has encouraged me to be creative myself.

Can you remember the first creative work you did and what was your experience about it?

My very first "real" creative job was with a film festival 2018 in Stockholm, I designed

their whole visual identity that year. I had a lot of fun and the best part was meeting and working with everyone else, and together creating something creative and memorable.

How are you developing your talents?

Always being open to learning new techniques and software. School is really pushing me to constantly develop and learn more.

Where do you get inspiration?

Personally, inspiration comes in waves and when it does I make sure to write all my ideas down. If I find myself in a drought I usually take a look at what other designers and creators are doing, which is always inspiring.

What do you eventually want to do 10 years from now?

I have no idea but I think I would like to pursue motion graphics somehow. Whether it's the film, marketing, or gaming industry. But that can also change.

What have you learned so far in life that you can share with other young people pursuing their dreams?

I am no expert what so ever and I really do not have anything figured out yet, but always being open to opportunities and listening to your peers is extremely important in this line of work. Being selfish will never get you anywhere.



NEWS

Alienette Coldfire at the GSIS Museum

with reports from
Marthy Angue | Manila

MANILA, Philippines – Returning home after receiving massive international acclaim and social media buzz, blind Capizeña Singer Alienette Coldfire (also known as Katchry Golbin) performed at the GSIS Museo ng Sining, March 7, 2019 to the delight of new fans and old. Accompanied by pianist and former Roots and Wings contributor Michael Lao Cu, the “A la Hauteur de Ma Voix” concert featured songs in five languages and in a variety of styles ranging from classic Broadway showtunes and hit Disney themes to Cebuano folk songs, Italian opera and French ballads. It should be noted that the artist had learned to speak French online to better

understand the iconic Edith Piaf song “La Vie en Rose.”

Even before finishing third in France’s Got Talent 2016, Ms. Coldfire has been making rounds on social media after a video of her singing Mariah Carey’s “I’ll Be There” went viral in 2014. She was in the country recording an album, much awaited by guests of the concert after hearing the concert’s namesake song. “A la Hauteur de Ma Voix,” a song she wrote in French, succinctly drove home her message of striving after her dreams to overcome all obstacles.

NEWS

Viva Europa 2019 launches

with reports from
Marthy Angue | Manila

MANILA, Philippines – The European Union Delegation to the Philippines, together with EU Member States' Embassies and European cultural institutes, launched “Viva Europa 2019” in Makati’s artsy Poblacion district on April 8, 2019 at. A month-long celebration of European Culture, EU Ambassador Franz Jessen has expressed a hope to reinforce “mutual understanding and strengthening people-to-people links” through the event.

Themed “Go Techno,” this year’s Viva Europa is heavily inspired by the EU’s Copernicus Programme, a space-age global monitoring and research initiative that is meant to provide information for everything from climate change to food security. Learning events and activities for the youth will be conducted in partnership with Filipino institutions such as the Museo Pambata and the Manila Astronomical Society.

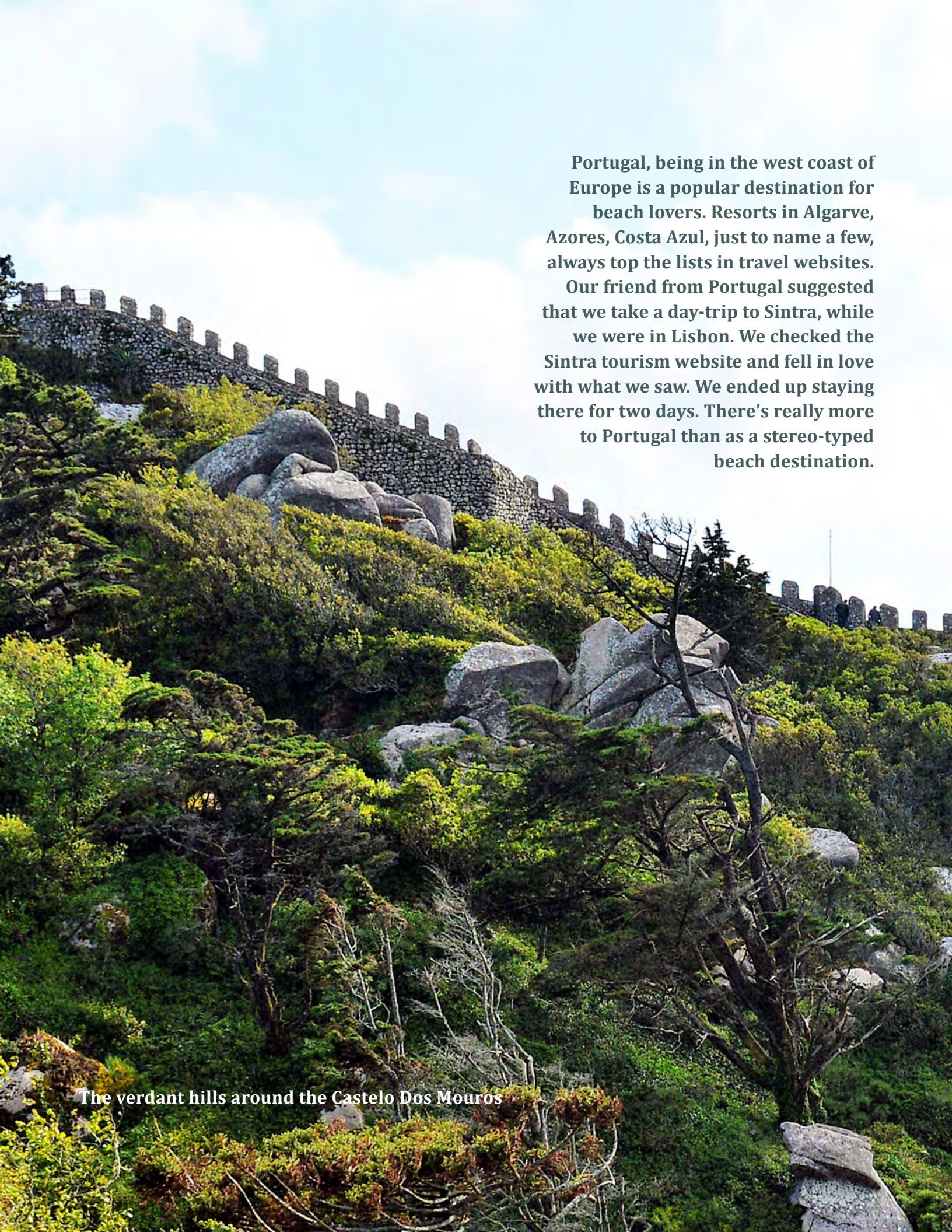
Healthy living will also be at the forefront of Viva Europa with its promotion of Biking Culture through special Bohol bike tours and its signature VeloMai bike-to-work-challenge throughout May. It will also be promoting Football among disadvantaged communities through the Schuman Cup to be held on May 4.

On the cultural side, the 2019 Euro-Pinoy Concert will be held on May 7, 2019 at the Ruins in Poblacion, Makati while “Musica FEuropa”,

the yearly nationwide choir competition, will be running from 25 to 26 May at the Far Eastern University.

Viva Europa 2019 is made possible through cooperation between the EU Delegation to the Philippines and the Embassies of Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom, as well as Alliance Francaise, the British Council, the Goethe-Institut, Instituto Cervantes and the Philippine-Italian Association in partnership with Filipino institutions. Roots and Wings will be at the events as they unfold.





Portugal, being in the west coast of Europe is a popular destination for beach lovers. Resorts in Algarve, Azores, Costa Azul, just to name a few, always top the lists in travel websites. Our friend from Portugal suggested that we take a day-trip to Sintra, while we were in Lisbon. We checked the Sintra tourism website and fell in love with what we saw. We ended up staying there for two days. There's really more to Portugal than as a stereo-typed beach destination.

The verdant hills around the Castelo Dos Mouros

SINTRA

LISBON'S CHARMING NEIGHBOR

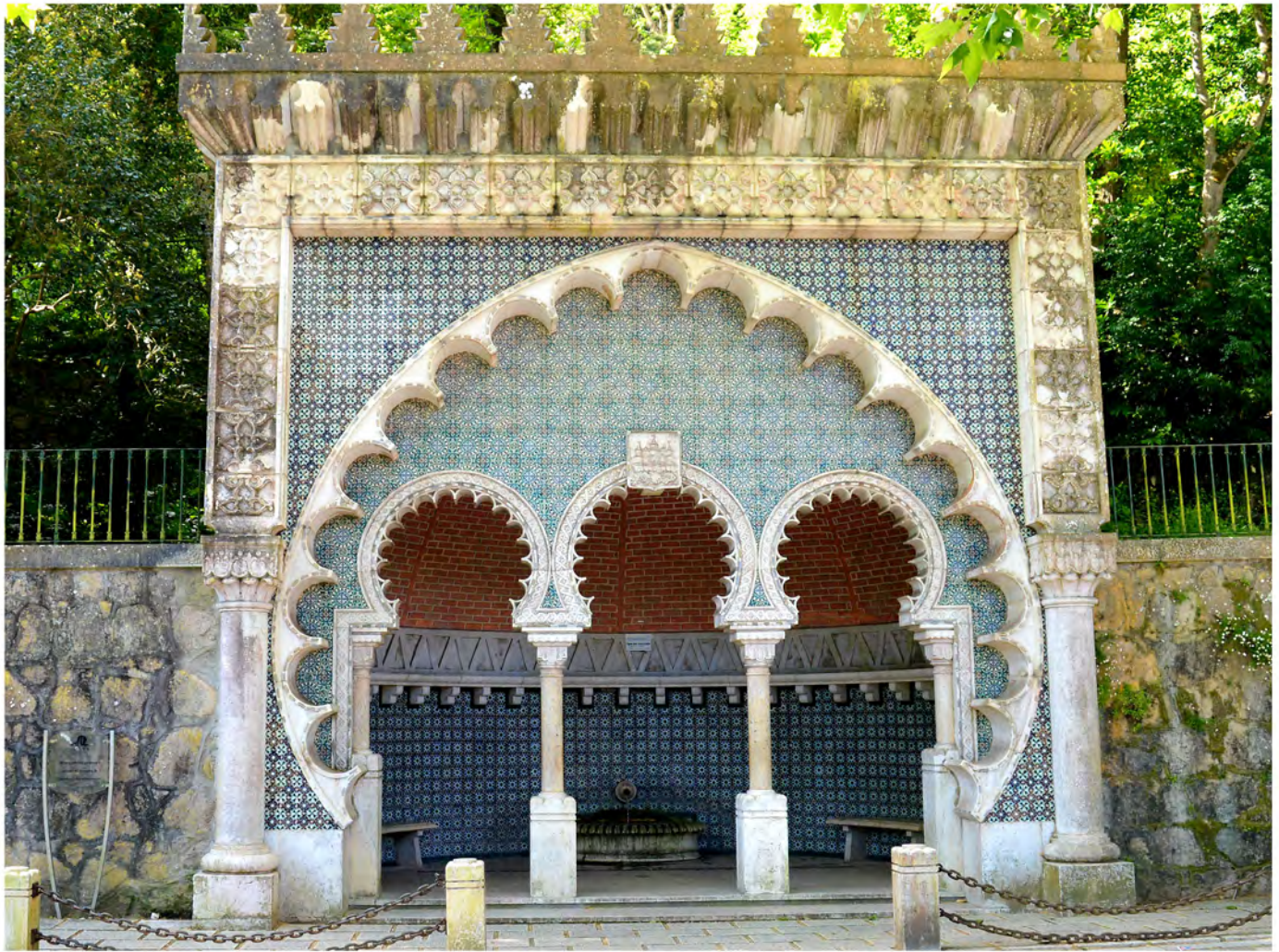
Sintra became the first centre of Romanticism in the 19th century. Thanks to King Ferdinand II! His passion for art and love for opera transformed the vast plots of land into magnificent and colourful castles. His creativity resonated through the use of mixed

architectural elements: Gothic, Egyptian, Moorish and Renaissance. Sintra with its lush highlands, verdant landscapes, and fresh air, then became the favourite summer home for the Portuguese royal family.

Since 1995, Sintra is a World Heritage by UNESCO in the category of Cultural Landscape. It is only 25 kilometres from Lisbon city and accessible via train from the Rossio station with a journey time of approximately 40 minutes. The one-way fare is around €2.50.

words and photos by
Lorna Real-del Rosario | Galway
joeyslornawritesagain.weebly.com





The Fonte Mourisca or Moorish Fountain in Volta do Duche street is adorned with beautiful azulejos.

When in Sintra, here's a list of must do:

1. Take an early morning walk.

Whenever we are on holidays, here or abroad, I always insist on walking. I really love walking. It makes me easily assimilate with the culture of my destination. It gives me a different kind of satisfaction, allowing me to pause and admire the beauty in front of me. This is why we rarely take city bus tours or the HOHO (hop-on, hop-off) types of tours.

Sintra is no exception. With the cool breeze and calm neighbourhood, it's a perfect formula for a good walk. After our breakfast, we

walked from our hostel to the town centre passing the streets of Volta Duche lined with sculptures.

2. Bring a piece of art.

As you wander around Sintra, or probably in every Portuguese city, it is very common to see structures cladded with colourfully-painted ceramic tiles. These traditional tiles are known as azulejos. It has been said that azulejos have been used as decorations for public spaces and even private homes since the 13th century when the Moors invaded Portugal.

In the winding and narrow alleyways of



The Streets of Sintra.

Sintra's old town, you can find a large array of these artwork on display. Ask them to customise a piece for you and take it back home as a lovely souvenir.

3. Visit the Palacio de Pena, the crown of the Sintra region.

If you're physically fit and healthy, you can walk for about 3km to Pena from the town centre. However, since the road is very steep and narrow, it is a very arduous and long walk. As we were pressed for time, we took Bus No. 434 (Circuito da Pena Route) from the tourist office and paid a little over 5 Euro. The bus dropped us off just outside the main gate of the palace. We took a short walk up to get to the palace entrance; it was a great introduction to the scenery.

In the olden times, this was a monastery and chapel to honour the Virgin Mary called "Our Lady of Pena." It became an important pilgrimage site after news of apparition of the Virgin Mary. In 1755, the place was heavily damaged during the Great Earthquake that struck Lisbon. Miraculously, the chapel survived unscathed. In 1838, then King consort Ferdinand II acquired the monastery and the surrounding lands. He did not just rebuild the monastery but also constructed Pena Palace to rival the Neuschwanstein castle in Bavaria. The palace served the Portuguese royal family until 1910 during the Portuguese revolution ending the constitutional monarchy.

Often likened to a marzipan cake with its colourful facade, this palace is really a treat to see! It is so well-decorated that it looks like something taken from a fairy tale book.

Its ceramic-tiled courtyard, the bold red and faded yellow-colour combination, the unique details of its walls, interiors & pillars, the arches, and the turrets will surely captivate one's attention. It's up in the mountains with extraordinary views. From the vistas, we saw a bird's eye view of Sintra town and the remnants of the Moorish castle.

4. Walk up the steps of Castelo dos Mouros.

From Palacio de Pena, we took Bus No. 434 again to get to the Moorish castle. The castle is a fortification build high above the mountains of Sintra by the North African Moors around the 10th century. It went into heavy disrepair when Portugal was conquered by Christians. With King Ferdinand II in command, the castle was restored as a romantic ruin during the 19th century. Because of its winding steps and steep climb to the towers, it reminded me of a mini-version of Great Wall of China. We really enjoyed our walk here; we walked up to the highest tower. The steps though uneven are well-maintained and the castle remnants are very well-preserved. There are also walking trails that you can follow.

We had a blast on our two-day stay in Sintra. I think a trip to Lisbon is incomplete without having to see this charming town. It's obvious why the royal families fell in love with this place. It's now up to us to enjoy what they have built for us. So, the next time you are heading to Portugal, include Sintra in your destination radar!

Its intricate and unique details on the walls, pillars and interiors are mesmerizing!



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