



CHAMORRO DIRECTION: An Interview with Alex Muñoz

WORDS: JAC PERRY | PHOTO: MARIE OVIEDO

OFTEN CALLED “Q.D.C.” FOR “QUICK AND DEADLY CHAMORRO,” Guam native and Los Angeles resident, Alex Muñoz has developed a reputation as a talented and inventive writer and film director whose work reflects his advocacy for social change. He describes his work as, “Exploring the inevitable collisions between cultures in the modern global environment.”

Muñoz earned his MFA from the University of Southern California School of Film and Television. During his graduate studies, Muñoz began directing music videos and commercials, quickly working among well-known actors. Most notably, John Leguizamo as Miss Liberty for MTV’s Rock the Vote campaign and an MCI commercial featuring Dennis Miller. “He’s a big asshole. I recommend he suck on some betel nut,” Muñoz says of Miller.

Stylish, provocative and edgy, Muñoz’s films have gained him recognition in the film industry along with several awards. “Por Vida,” Muñoz’s first short film, premiered at the prestigious and well-known Sundance Film Festival. His debut feature film, “Living the Life,” was given honorable mention for Best Domestic Feature Film at the 2002 New York Latino Film Festival.

Muñoz’s work in “Riot,” Showtime’s 1997 anthology of the Los Angeles riots that took place after the brutalizing of Rodney King, generated audience empathy toward Latino kids looting in Los Angeles stores. His intention is to “humanize marginalized populations and to give voice to the disaffected.” Other works that feature this message are “Living the Life,” a feature drama about young girl gangs, and the short film “Dilemma,” about racial tensions in a Los Angeles-area juvenile detention camp. The founder and creative director of FYI: Films by Youth Inside, a program that teaches filmmaking to youth detained in probation camps, his work “Dilemma” starred several of his FYI graduates.

To pay homage to his Pacific Islander roots, Muñoz has several projects with Guam and the Chamorro culture as their focus. He wrote and directed “The Return of our Elder Hurao,” a short film telling the story of a Chamorro chief who stood against Spanish conquistadors. In Guam, Alex produced “Prutehei Hao,” a responsible sex video for the island’s youth. He is currently in production on “Camp Roxas: The Illongos Story,” a documentary about the epic migration of Filipinos to Guam after World War II.

Another project, “The Flying Proa,” a feature length documentary about a group of Chamorros constructing a replica of the Guam-renowned ancient vessel, is in the pre-production phase.

Muñoz’s most recent completed work, “L’il Skrappy Boy,” the story of a kid who quit life in a gang, won Best Documentary Short Award at the 2007 Urban World Vibe Film Festival in New York.

More than talented and intelligent, Muñoz has a terrific sense of humor. He jokes, “In Hollywood, everyone’s either 19 or 29 [years old]. My age is the equivalent of the velocity of a falling object due to gravitational pull times four. And the sum of the numerical values which represent the date Napoleon was declared Emperor.”

When Muñoz first moved to Los Angeles, he worked music video production for huge names. “I’m the film director formerly known as the stand-in for the artist formerly known as the symbol,” he says. “I was Prince’s stand in for two of his music videos. I’m taller than him even when he wears four-inch heels,” Muñoz says. “Isn’t that weird that I was Prince’s stand-in? He’s so ‘not of this world.’”

Muñoz shares a memory, especially fitting for this interview and our island readers. “A significant actor in a project I was filming was screwing around all the time. He showed up late, hung-over and he just wasn’t showing any effort. He was really screwing up and out of frustration; I threw my zori at him. We are now good friends,” he says.

In the film industry, he has gained much attention and support. The buzz created by Muñoz has led to an unusual fan base. “There is no base to my fans because they are ceiling fans and they are suspended so there is no need for them to have bases,” he says, matter-of-factly.

Muñoz is a Sundance Fellow and a Rockefeller Foundation and USA Artists Foundation nominee. He is also an alternate for the 2007 NBC-Universal Directing Program and was one of three filmmakers selected for the 2006 CBS Diversity Directing Program.

He currently is casting for his highly anticipated project, “I Fuetsan I Tao Tao,” a narrative feature screenplay to be shot in Guam and California next year. When not directing award winning films or inspiring troubled youth, Muñoz considers himself, “a hustla.” “My hustlaship is flawless,” he assures. [+]

“A SIGNIFICANT ACTOR IN A PROJECT I WAS FILMING WAS SCREWING AROUND ALL THE TIME. HE SHOWED UP LATE, HUNG-OVER AND HE JUST WASN’T SHOWING ANY EFFORT. HE WAS REALLY SCREWING UP AND OUT OF FRUSTRATION; I THREW MY ZORI AT HIM. WE ARE NOW GOOD FRIENDS,”



QuiKen

WORDS: JAC PERRY | PHOTOS: RC RIVERA

"USING NO WAY AS A WAY, USING NO LIMITATIONS AS A LIMITATION." This, from Bruce Lee, is a favorite quote of Ken Quitugua and the message it carries continues to be inspirational in his personal and professional life.

Chamorro-Filipino Kenneth Mendoza Quitugua, known to his friends as "Kendo," has his hands full as a martial artist, actor, owner of a clothing label and professional graphic designer. His heart, however, belongs to martial arts. Throughout the past 15 years, he has studied the disciplines of Shaolin Kung Fu, Wushu, Capoeira and, most recently, Muay Thai.

From a young age, Quitugua began making short, replica video recordings of his favorite fight sequences from such on-screen Kung Fu masters as Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung with his cousins and close friends. "We all went into the backyard and mimicked their moves and landed heavily onto stacks of pillows. Sorry, mom," Quitugua laments. "This team would later mature into a talented group of filmmakers known as Infinite Quest Productions."

Raised in the small Navy town of Bremerton, Washington, Quitugua was taught of his heritage and his family but has

never been to Guam. "I am scheduled to visit in December and I am very excited," he says.

Quitugua moved to San Francisco to study at and later graduate from the Academy of Art University with a degree in new media design. "After moving to San Francisco for college, I joined the independent stunt team ZeroGravity. I practiced every weekend—basic tumbling, falls, reactions and choreography," he says. Through the years, Quitugua and his collaborators at ZeroGravity completed some projects in which Quitugua starred. The films, a few buzz-worthy action shorts, were released online and can be viewed on YouTube.com. Titles include "Title Pending 2," "Damn 3" and "Kid Gusto vs. Matrix."

Other projects ZeroGravity has collaborated on include blockbuster and popular hits like "Pirates of the Caribbean," "Rush Hour," "The Protector" and "Norbit."

Quitugua works as a notable graphic designer in downtown San Francisco and has worked on numerous well-known packaging designs for such Electronic Arts brand video games as Madden NFL, NBA Live, Tiger Woods PGA Tour and The Sims, as well as several brand identities for San Francisco

// RELATIVELY NEW TO THE SCREEN, QUITUGUA HAS ALREADY GAINED ATTENTION FROM MARTIAL ART FILM FANS. "ONE TIME I WAS RECOGNIZED IN A BLOCKBUSTER VIDEO. ONE OF THE EMPLOYEES JOKINGLY TOLD MY GIRLFRIEND HE WOULD CLEAR OUR LATE FEES IF I DIDN'T BEAT HIM UP."

restaurant and beverage labels. "Although graphic design is my day job, which I love very much, my passions outside of work are what define me as an individual," he asserts.

"As I gained confidence with filmmaking and acting, I began to collaborate more and more with other filmmakers and martial artists." Quitugua and Infinite Quest Productions, since its inception in 1998, have worked with other teams, Antiparticle, The Stunt People, Cadence Clothing, ZeroGravity and most recently Persistence of Vision Films on several projects.

In early 2005, Quitugua was cast as the lead in the Persistence of Vision Films short film, "Bookie," directed by Tran Quoc Bao. "Bookie" premieres September 15 in Seattle. Another film in production since 2005, entitled "An Act of Revenge," will be released on DVD in September.

Quitugua recently started his own clothing label called Neosole (neosole.com). "It is an apparel company that designs shirts that match popular sneaker models such as Air Jordans, Classic Adidas, Puma and Reebok to name a few. Our first line will be available Fall 2007," Quitugua reports.

Relatively new to the screen, Quitugua has already gained

attention from martial art film fans. "One time I was recognized in a Blockbuster Video. One of the employees jokingly told my girlfriend he would clear our late fees if I didn't beat him up. I guess he had seen some of my fight videos online," Quitugua recalls.

Quitugua has always respected great filmmakers. "I'm always in awe of people that are able to bring their ideas to life on screen, eventually finding their ways into the hearts of viewers who latch onto them, considering them their favorites," Quitugua says. "I hope one day to co-star alongside a very respectable cast and crew to create a film that may someday make its way into the heart of at least one viewer out there and for them to consider it their favorite."

Quitugua's short films can be viewed on YouTube.com or on his Myspace profile at www.myspace.com/quiken. More about his films nearing release can be found at www.bookiethemovie.com and www.anactofrevenge.com.

Keep a close watch on Quitugua's career as he continues to get attention and cast in larger projects. **[+]**