

Veejay Rius Villafranca's (b. 1982, Manila) practice in documentary photography grew from his early exposure to the field of photojournalism. He joined the staff of the *Philippine Graphic* as a sophomore student in 2003. He was working as a photographer for the *Business Mirror* and a stringer for international wire agencies, starting with Agence France-Presse and the Reuters, by the time he graduated in 2005.

This affinity for the newsroom stems partly from filial and paternal history: Villafranca's grandfather was a journalist for the *Philippine Herald* and his father a photographer for a government agency. From them and other mentors, he developed a sense of self-study, rigor, and work ethic. First assigned to the Presidential beat, Villafranca covered various national issues, including events around the insurgency in Southern Mindanao. His earliest photo essays, starting with a feature on the Badjao ethnic group in Zamboanga in 2004, were responses to various situations encountered in the field.

Villafranca's transition to documentary projects grew between the years 2005 to 2007, when he participated in a workshop for young Asian journalists, completed a diploma course in photojournalism, and worked on freelance wire, commercial and editorial assignments. He began chronicling moments of the aftermath: revisiting people and places left behind, once the rush of news coverage subsides, as starting points for new stories.

Employing the narrative format of annotated black and white photographs, Villafranca's documentary projects often revolve around the lives of communities in states of transition. Returning to sites affected by war, extreme weather events, underdevelopment and other trajectories of displacement, Villafranca persists beyond the witnessing of trauma and seeks quiet moments of sufferance, resilience and hope.

His first documentary photo series, *Marked: Gangs of Baseco*, won the Ian Parry Scholarship Award in the United Kingdom in 2008. Villafranca is the first Asian recipient of this grant, which offers support for young photographers working on personal projects. Since then, he has participated in various residency programs and explored both traditional and non-traditional exhibition platforms for his work. Currently a correspondent for international photo agencies, he also develops long-term documentary stories, exhibition and book projects with aid organizations and institutions across the Philippines and Asia.

References:

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